

*My school, Your school, Our School: Celebrating the  
Transformation of a Primary School into a Community  
Learning Centre, 1985-2005.*

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or another person for the purpose of obtaining any other qualification.

Signed: Ann Higgins  
Date June 2008



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## **Abbreviations**

BOM Board of Management

CDP Community Development Project

CLVEC City of Limerick Vocational Educational Committee

CMRS Council of Major Religious Superiors

CPA Combat Poverty Agency

CSO Central Statistics Office

DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

DES Department of Education and Science

EDR Economic Dependency Ratio

ESLI Early School Leaver's Initiative

ESRI Economic and Social Research Institute

FER Feminist Emancipatory Research

FAS CE Foras Áiseanna Saothair Community Employment scheme

GCEB Giving Children an Even Break

GTM Grounded Theory Methodology

HSCL Home School Community Liaison scheme

INTO Irish National Teachers Organisation

KCP Kileely Community Project

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development

PAUL People Against Unemployment in Limerick

PEI Photo Elicitation interview

RTÉ Radio Teilifis Eireann

RTT Resource Teacher for Travellers

SAPS Small Area Population Statistics

SES Socio Economic Status

SNA Special Needs Assistant

USA United States of America



## ABSTRACT

My School, Your School, Our School: Celebrating the transformation of a Primary School into a Community Learning Centre, 1985-2005.

Success within the educational system is closely correlated to employment prospects, health, living conditions, intergenerational learning, poverty, and quality of life. This study excavates the factors that influence educational success by exploring the factors that impact on learning accessibility. This work is informed by a socio-ecological framework which draws on the scholarship of ecological and capital theorists, including Bronfenbrenner, Bourdieu, Coleman, Putman. This study explores the factors located within the three ecologies of home, school, and community and how these impact on learning accessibility. This work is also informed by Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, success theory, and resilience theory. Furthermore, it is scaffolded by the literature on hope, leadership, and social capital.

The core theme which problematises learning accessibility is mediated through a longitudinal case study spanning twenty years. This case study charts the transformation of a DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) primary school in Limerick City into a community learning centre. In 1985, Kileely Community Project (KCP) evolved within the confines of a primary school. Led by a local committee KCP offered a wide variety of learning and social programmes to adults and children, within and outside of school hours. The aim of this study is to describe the process by which this transformation occurred and the impact it had on the lives of individuals and the ecologies of home, school, and community. Finally this study excavates the factors that contributed to the survival, success, and sustainability of KCP.

This project is guided conceptually by feminist emancipatory research and methodologically by case study design. The data set included fifty semi-structured interviews and six focus groups. Data was analysed using grounded theory, representing the voices of children, parents, teachers, tutors, and ancillary staff. Interview data includes autobiographical and narrative inquiry sources.

This thesis contributes epistemological insights in the area of targeted educational intervention by generating a model of intervention, along with a set of comprehensive guiding principles. This intervention model is school-based, inter-generational, ecological, multi-service, power sensitive, and needs-led. It is guided by a set of reflective tools that enables a three-fold investigation into how we act, how we think, and finally how we feel.

This study finds that KCP had a transformational impact on the lives of children and adults. It also metamorphosed the role of the school within the community, made a positive contribution to home cultures, and created a sense of pride and belonging in the community.





## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION: SEEKING OUR HEART'S TREASURE**



# 1. INTRODUCTION: SEEKING OUR HEART'S TREASURE

## 1.1 Background

*I am a sailor, you're my first mate  
We sailed on together, we coupled our fate  
We hauled up our anchor, determined not to fail  
For the heart's treasure, together we set sail*  
(Johnny Duhan)

This thesis celebrates the evolution and transformation of a Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Primary school into a community learning centre. The transformation process from a Primary school into a community learning centre began in 1985 when, in 'a small converted cloakroom', a group of local parents seated on old timber desks began an uncharted learning journey. I was an integral part of that venture since I had called this crew together in a quest to build their skills so that they could more effectively support their own children's learning journeys. As together we plotted our own course, this self-directed journey brought us into the world of educational accessibility.

I am privileged to have been part of that journey, as together we claimed the rights of children and adults to learn. I am also privileged to write this thesis that tells the story of that epic voyage, and the impact Kileely Community Project (KCP) had on people's lives, and on the ecologies of home, school, and community. This study also excavates the factors that contributed to the success and sustainability of this unique endeavour.

Within the confines of a small primary school KCP emerged as an holistic, grassroots response to identified child and adult learning needs. The child-focused activities included an after school programme called the 'Three O'Clock School', Saturday morning art classes, a crèche, and a pre-school. The adult focused activities included morning and evening classes for adults and a SPACE programme for young women who were mothers and were not in school or in employment. There was also a strong social dimension to KCP. We offered a variety of opportunities for adults and children to go on holidays, go for meals, and go on day trips. KCP is managed by a committee of local women along with myself as Director. I am a former pupil, teacher, and Principal of the school and co-founder of KCP.

## **1.2 Research objectives**

In this thesis I endeavour to create an accessible text which respects and reflects the life stories and wisdom of the participants in KCP. Through this unique study I hope to contribute to the epistemology in the area of learning accessibility. My quest for knowledge is informed by a variety of theoretical fields which scaffold and guide the research process. The core research question, ‘How and in what ways was learning created, developed, and sustained over a twenty year period in a community learning partnership’, is activated through an exploration of factors affecting the development, growth, impact, and sustainability of KCP over a twenty year period.

Embedded within a rich literature review, this study specifically aims to describe the context in which KCP evolved, and to understand its impact on people’s lives and the three ecologies of home, school, and community. Finally this study excavates the factors which enabled KCP to succeed and survive for over twenty years.

## **1.3 Structure of this thesis**

I draw on a number of diverse theoretical disciplines to inform my study. Indeed, it is my contention that while specific theories are embedded within and applied across individual chapters, there is an overall cohesion and synergy between the various theoretical constructs which inform and scaffold this work. Ultimately, in the deep heart’s core, hope emerges as the common and connecting element which is intrinsic to both theory and practice. The remainder of Chapter One outlines the chapter structure of this thesis.

In **Chapter Two** ‘ A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility’, I construct a socio-ecological framework which provides both a justification and a literary context for this study. The barriers to learning accessibility are explored across the ecologies of home, school, and community. Proactive partnership is advanced as a mechanism by which to readdress barriers to learning. Partnership practice demands co operative practice, sharing of power, and vision for a better future. This chapter also profiles the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) in Ireland and the Community School Movement in USA, as examples of

initiatives designed to address educational attainment and accessibility from a partnership perspective.

In **Chapter Three** ‘Methodology: Beyond Tools of Inquiry’ I provide a rationale for adopting a feminist emancipatory research philosophical stance to guide this study. This philosophy promotes a constructive relationship between researchers and participants and prioritises transformative outcomes as a consequence of the research process. Subsequently, I define the research methodologies which inform this qualitative study. In so doing I describe the data gathering and analytic processes, and draw on the fields of narrative inquiry and grounded theory.

In **Chapter Four** ‘Data Sources and Collection Process’ I provide a comprehensive account of the range of primary and secondary data sources which inform this work. As well as providing a detailed inventory of data sources, I also describe the processes of data collection.

In **Chapter Five** ‘Area Profile’, I describe the geographical, social, educational, demographic, economic, and historical context in which KCP developed. This chapter, augmented by Appendix C, is informed by both quantitative and qualitative data sources. I draw on census data, local studies, and rich descriptions from participant interviews to set the study in context.

In **Chapter Six**, ‘Journey of Hope: Transference, Transition and Transformation’, I chronicle the developments of KCP over a twenty year period. This journey is inspired and informed by hope. Hope is understood as the fundamental belief in the capacity of all human beings to critique and act upon our worlds. This chapter situates the evolution of KCP within a transformational and empowering discourse.

In **Chapter Seven**, ‘Did Kileely Community Project Make a Difference?’ I explore the impact of KCP on the lives of individuals and on the three ecologies of home, school, and community. While the impact of KCP is informed by the socio-ecological framework presented in Chapter Two, it is also understood with reference to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory, resilience theory and success theory (1954).

In **Chapter Eight**, ‘Celebrating the Survival, Success and Sustainability of Kileely Community Project: Excavating the Factors that made Kileely Community Project work’, I present a rationale for why KCP worked. Drawing on both social capital and leadership theory I endeavour to explain the factors which enabled KCP to succeed and to continue to exist over twenty years after its foundation.

In **Chapter Nine**, ‘Researcher as Participant’ I describe the tensions and challenges of locating myself within this text. I draw on a rich and emerging literature which problematises the depersonalisation of the researcher and I embrace the challenge to become an integral component of the research process.

In **Chapter Ten**, ‘Conclusion; Kileely Community Project, The Heartbeat of the Community’, I briefly revisit the research objectives and subsequently summarise this study. Finally, I present a model for educational intervention that is school-based, incremental, community led, intergenerational and ecological. This model is operationalised through a comprehensive set of guiding principles.

#### **1.4 Chapter conclusion**

This longitudinal case study is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, by sharing the stories of the participants, this study acts as a conduit between their world and yours, and consequently, I hope, serves to build an appreciation of the challenges and achievements of those involved in this study. Secondly, I share the wisdom and experiences of research participants who courageously shared their stories with me, and in so doing I believe I make an important contribution to the epistemology in the area of educational intervention. We live in an unequal society, and the educational system holds the promise and potential to do its part to address this inequality by working in partnership with key stakeholders and by working courageously with vision.

Targeted areas within Limerick City are currently undergoing a regeneration process. Education is identified as a key area of intervention. The Regeneration vision document, ‘*Our Community, Our Vision, Our Future*’ was launched after extensive consultation with residents and agencies in targeted areas. The report states that:

initiatives to address educational disadvantage will have to be prioritised during the course of regeneration. This strategy will identify how schools can be supported, not only in developing their facilities, but also in providing a comprehensive range of services to pupils both in and out-of-school (Limerick Northside Regeneration Agency, 2008:16).

This report embraces the potential of the school to act as a ‘neighbourhood hub for community education, learning and development’ (Limerick Northside Regeneration Agency, 2008:19). This study presents a well-tested model of educational intervention in which the school became a neighbourhood hub which provided learning opportunities for adults and children.

I embrace the metaphor of a sea voyage throughout this study. This metaphor is enriched with reference to Limerick lyricist Johnny Duhan’s song ‘Voyage’.





## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE FACTORS AFFECTING LEARNING ACCESSIBILITY**



## **2. A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE FACTORS AFFECTING LEARNING ACCESSIBILITY**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This thesis addresses issues pertaining to the *Accessibility of Learning*. I define accessibility of learning as the individual's personal circumstances and experiences, located within and across contexts which impede or support that person in accessing learning. The core theme, i.e. accessibility of learning, emerges because ultimately Kileely Community Project (KCP) is an educational intervention, founded to make learning accessible to adults and children. The model of service delivery which evolved to achieve that goal, and how effectively that aspiration was achieved, is the underlying story of this thesis.

In this chapter I construct a socio-ecological framework to 'provide the background and the justification for the research undertaken' (Murray, 2002:102). I firstly present a capital construct, cognisant of differing and indeed competing interpretations of capital as a framework with which to interpret the social world. I subsequently present Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework. I then present a rationale for adopting a socio-ecological framework as a mechanism to guide my investigation of the literature. Informed by this framework I explore the micro ecologies of home, school, and community. Finally, I investigate the mesosystemic ecological dimension through the exploration of partnership as a mechanism to address learning accessibility. This socio-ecological framework informs a number of other chapters including Chapter Five, 'Area Profile', Chapter Seven, 'Did Kileely Community Project Make a Difference?', Chapter Six, 'Journey of Hope: Transference, Transition and Transformation', and finally Chapter Eight, 'Celebrating the Survival, Success and Sustainability of Kileely Community Project, Excavating the Factors that Made Kileely Community Project work'.

### **2.2 Capital: Theory, rationale, and application**

It is remarkable how seemingly unrelated life experiences collide when least expected. I spent many years of my life working with very young children. One of the tasks of the infant teacher is to help children to identify and classify elements within their world. They learn to classify animals, plants, musical instruments, and mathematical concepts, to mention but a few. They do this through observation, conversation, and action. Capital theorists classify the social world, albeit in a more

sophisticated and complex mode. The rationale in classification is to provide a framework through which to examine and interpret our world. Bourdieu, one of the more prominent capital theorist, views the social world as ‘accumulated history’, and contends that ‘if it is not to be reduced to a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria ... one must reintroduce into it the notion of capital, and with it, accumulation and all its effects’ (1986:241). He posits that ‘it is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory’ (ibid: 242).

The concept of capital as a multi-faceted framework with which to interpret the social world has been significantly developed and applied as an investigative tool. It is not however without its dissenters. Theorists are expressing concern particularly in relation to social capital, that the concept as it is currently extended and applied may become dilute and so lose its meaning (Foley and Edwards 1999, Dika and Singh 2002, Smith and Kulynych 2002, Lin et al. 2001). Indeed, Smith and Kulynych problematize ‘the analytic and ideological consequences of the use of the word *capital* in reference to the structures and relations that the term capital purports to comprehend and describe’ (2002:150). They go so far as to argue that the term ‘impedes understanding by blurring key analytic distinctions’ (ibid:150). Lowndes problematizes the shortcomings of the theoretical construct as it has evolved to date and draws our attention to the ‘curious silence within the social capital debate about gender dynamics’ (2000:533), a concern echoed by Field (1999). Morrow, whose research lies in the area of health and social capital posits that social capital has become elusive and poorly specified, ‘and that the use of the term is inherently problematic and needs to be carefully critiqued and empirically grounded before it can be usefully applied in social policy formulations’ (1999:745). Finally, Dika and Singh note that ‘the conceptual umbrella of social capital has been stretched to include a variety of social factors that do not coherently hang together’ (2002:46). Halpern acknowledges this disquiet but counteracts it, stating that to ‘some of the most outstanding scholars in the world today, social capital is the most important and exciting concept to emerge out of the social sciences in fifty years’ (2005:1). He embraces and welcomes the development of the social capital construct, believing that it ‘gives a name to something that many came to feel was missing in the simplified economic worldview’ (ibid:2).

Informed but not perturbed by these concerns I now proceed to examine and adopt capital as a theoretical construct to inform this work. I do so for the following reasons. Firstly, while it is an evolving and therefore imperfect tool, it is still widely used and applied within educational research. Secondly, since it an evolving construct, this work may indeed contribute to the evolving field. Thirdly, the notion of capital, in all its interpretations, includes power as a constituent component and with it the opportunity to confront power and powerlessness, agency, and self actualisation, all of which are recurring themes within this work. Starhawk states that ‘the way we describe the world determines how we will value and experience the world’ (1987:20). Finally, using a capital framework to aid investigation politicises the process to the extent that it enables reflection and discussion on power and powerlessness.

In the following section I explore the concept of capital theory. I do so guided by Lin’s thesis which subdivides capital theory into ‘Classical Theory of Capital’ and ‘Neo-Capital Theory’ (2001).

### **2.2.1 Classical theory**

Classical capital theory, a macroanalytic construct, has its roots in Marxism. Marx believed capital emerged ‘from social relations between the bourgeoisie (capitalists) and laborers in the process of commodity production and consumption’ (Lin, 2001:4). The capitalist generates profits during the production process as the production costs are less than the value of the commodity which has been created. Profits are further generated by capitalists through trade and consumption. Thus, the capitalist who is ‘bestowed with resources (capital) to begin with (e.g. land ownership, aristocracy, inheritance) and who engages in commodity production’ (ibid:4), increases his wealth (capital), while at the same time the labourers ‘earn the value of their labor ... which is exchanged to get the essential goods for survival’ (ibid:5). The outcomes for capitalist and labourer therefore differ fundamentally. Marx’s theory is ‘a theory of the exploitive social relations between two classes’ (ibid:7).

Fundamentally, capital as conceived by Marx has a number of core attributes. Firstly it is ‘intimately associated with the production and exchange of commodities’ (ibid:7). Secondly, the production of capital involves a number of processes, including investment, production, and trade within the market place. Capital is

accumulated when the market value of the commodity exceeds the production costs. Furthermore, capital is ‘intrinsically a social notion’ (ibid:7), which entails social activity. Fundamentally the profits (capital) from the process of production and trade reside with the capitalist. Classical theory is rooted in exploitation, investment, production, consumption, and trade.

### **2.2.2 Neo-Classical theory**

Neo-classical theorists favour a microanalytic approach to deconstructing the social world. This theory differs fundamentally from its classical counterpart in that it allows labourers to invest ‘and thus acquire certain capital of their own’ (Lin, 2001:6). Prominent among the neo-classical capital theorists are Bourdieu 1986, Coleman 1988, Putman 1995, Becker 1964, Schultz 1961, Lin 2001, and Becker 1964. These scholars and others developed and adopted theoretical capital frameworks and applied them in areas of education, health, housing, and employment. Time and space constraints do not allow extensive analysis of the development and application of capital as an investigative framework. However, I present a number of key theoretical capital constructs which have influenced thinking and research in the field of the social sciences.

Bourdieu attributed a number of core characteristics to his capital construct. Firstly, he noted ‘capital is accumulated labour’ which when activated by agents ‘enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor’ (1986:241). Secondly, capital takes ‘time to accumulate’, and has the ‘potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form’ (ibid:241). Finally, Bourdieu subdivides capital into economic capital and symbolic capital, the latter subdivided into cultural and social capital. Firstly, he presents the concept of *economic capital*, ‘which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights’ (ibid:243).

The second construct, symbolic capital is firstly understood as ‘*cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications’ (Bourdieu, 1986:243).

Finally, symbolic capital may be understood as '*social capital* made up of social obligations ("connections"), which are convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility' (ibid:243).

Lin contends that 'Bourdieu considers these forms [cultural, economic, social,] of capital as largely in the hands of the dominant class, since it occupies the top positions in society' (2001:15), resonating strongly with Marxist theory. According to Di Maggio the importance of Bourdieu's capital concept 'lies in the fact that it directs us to both the uses that actors make of cultural competencies in their daily efforts to improve their lot and to institutions that mint, guarantee, and sacralize certain kinds of culture as signs of distinction - that is, to the problem of institutionalised cultural authority' (1991: 134). I will now examine specific traits of each of these three capital forms conscious of the relatedness of each to the other.

#### **2.2.2.1 Economic capital**

Economic capital is perhaps the most straightforward concept to grasp. Portes notes 'economic capital is in people's bank accounts' (1998:7). Basically it comprises of money and property rights. According to Coleman 'financial capital is approximately measured by the family's wealth or income' (1988:S109). Postone et al. define economic capital 'as the most efficient form of capital; a characterizing trait of capitalism, it alone can be conveyed in the guise of general, anonymous, all-purpose, convertible money from one generation to the next' (1993:5). Significantly, they contend that it can be 'more easily and efficiently converted into symbolic (that is, social and cultural) capital than vice versa, although symbolic capital can ultimately be transformed into economic capital' (ibid:5). Bourdieu contends that while 'the different types of capital can be derived from economic capital' that this is achieved 'at the cost of a more or less great effort of transformation, which is needed to produce the type of power effects in the field in question' (1986:252). In relation to this study, the issue of economic capital will be addressed through the exploration of themes of poverty, unemployment, and housing.

### 2.2.2.2 Cultural capital

Bourdieu sub-divides the second dimension, cultural capital into three forms, the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalised state. The *embodied* state is located in the form of ‘long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body’ (1986:243). The *objectified* state resides in the ‘form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines etc.)’ (ibid:243). Finally, the *institutionalised* state differs from the former as ‘it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital it is presumed to guarantee’ (ibid:243). In this study the embodied form of cultural capital resides in the attributes and attitudes of parents, teachers, and children, and how these relate to learning accessibility. The development of the concept of cultural capital facilitated Bourdieu to explain ‘the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes’. He explored the link between the class origin and academic success, specifically:

academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, [is attributed] to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions (1986:243).

Bourdieu acknowledges the importance of ‘the domestic transmission of cultural capital’ (1986:244). It follows that a domestic environment replete with cultural capital in its various forms may facilitate educational attainment more easily, thus making learning more accessible, than an environment without such privilege. Lynch, recognises the educational system as ‘an institutionalised form of cultural capital’ (1992:184). According to Lynch the educational system ‘complements material or economic capital as a major determinant of privilege and income in society’ (ibid:184). Furthermore, she contends that these forms of capital are ‘tradable’, since ‘material capital gives one greater access to education, while education gives one access to employment and therefore to economic or material capital’ (ibid:184).

Wescott Dodd and Konzal contend that ‘less educated parents may not understand the jargon-infested communications they get from the school. They often lack “cultural” capital, or know-how, that other parents have for negotiating with school officials...’ (2002:14). Lareau believes that ‘Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital highlights the point that the more parents share the same standards of institutions, the easier it is for



them to facilitate the success of their children' (1996:58). The objectified form of capital is made visible through the recognition of the effects of poverty and the lack of material resources on learning accessibility. Finally, the institutionalised state is made visible through the discussion of the link between educational accreditation and employment. According to di Maggio, 'Bourdieu's notion of *cultural capital* (1984) is indispensable for comprehending sociological aspects of the symbolic economy' (1991:134).

### **2.2.2.3 Social capital**

The concept of social capital is not new, it is however complex, and a more contested field than either economic or cultural capital. Smith and Kulynych credit Lyda Judson Hanifan with giving the term social capital 'the meaning it now famously enjoys ... when he was state supervisor of West Virginia rural schools' in 1916 (2002:154). They then trace the next manifestation of the term to Jane Jacobs, who used the term in 1961 in her discussion of urban neighbourhood networks. Bourdieu, like Jacobs, conceptualises social capital in terms of networks but 'his more systematic treatment relates them to the different theoretical concerns around which much of his work pivots: the structure and processes that facilitate the reproduction of power and privilege' (Smith and Kulynych, 2002:155). While both Hanifan and Jacobs conceptualised social capital, it was Bourdieu who popularised the concept. Bourdieu defined social capital as:

The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word' (1986:248).

According to Field and others (Foley and Edwards, Smith and Kulynych) three of the more prominent social capital theorists, Bourdieu 1986, Coleman 1987, 1988, and Putman 1993,1995, have conceptualised social capital differently. Field outlines these three directions as follows. Firstly, Field contends that Bourdieu sees social capital 'as an asset used by elite groups – particularly those who had limited financial capital and/or cultural capital, such as the French nobility – in their jockeying for position' (2003:40). Field noted that Coleman's social capital concept 'could also serve as a resource for the relatively disadvantaged' (ibid:40) and like Bourdieu, Coleman saw

this asset in the possession of individuals or families. Putman, however, sees social capital as a ‘resource that functioned at societal level’ (Field, 2003:40). Smith and Kulynych also problematized the differences between the key theorists in the field. They noted that:

Insofar as Coleman sees social capital as embodied in relations among individuals, there is an overlap between his perspective and Bourdieu’s’ and indeed there are ‘obvious parallels between the two scholar’s trinities: Coleman’s physical/human/social capital, and Bourdieu’s economic/cultural/social capital (2002: 157).

Smith and Kulynych differentiate between Bourdieu’s elitist-theory which conceptualises the function of social capital as ‘crucial for the reproduction of prevailing class, power and status relationships’, and Coleman’s pluralist more ‘benign’ functions (2002:157). In short, they contend that Bourdieu’s emphasis lies within class structures and Coleman’s lies among different classes with little attention to relations between strata or groups. Foley and Edwards identify the roots of Bourdieu’s construct with Marx, Coleman’s with Durkheim and Parsons, and Putman’s with Weber. They contend that while both Bourdieu and Coleman’s:

conceptions of social capital take the analogy of financial capital seriously ... Putman by contrast has popularised a notion of social capital which ties it to the production of collective goods such as ‘civic engagement’ or a spirit of cooperation available to a community or nation at large (1999:142).

Bourdieu sees social capital in terms of its possession by a dominant class and their investment to retain their dominant position. Coleman, whose interpretation dominates the educational literature (Dika and Singh, 2002:33), views social capital as an intangible entity with three forms, trust, information channels, and norms and sanctions. Putman, according to Dika and Singh, has more recently popularised an interpretation of social capital as an ‘attribute of community, a property of cities or nations’ (ibid:34). The development of a comprehensive social capital framework informs Chapter Eight, ‘Celebrating the Survival, Success And Sustainability of Kileely Community Project: Excavating The Factors that Made KCP Work’.

#### **2.2.2.4 Extending the capital concept: Human capital**

Human capital theory and classical capital theory differ in a number of fundamental ways. Firstly, while classical capital theory focuses on the ‘production and exchange of commodities’, human capital theory focuses on ‘a process associated with the

laborer ... and therefore it is the laborers themselves rather than the labor they perform, who figure centrally in the calculus of capital' (Lin, 2001:11). Becker acknowledges that 'the concept of human capital remains suspect within academic circles that organize their thinking about social problems around a belief in the exploitation of labor by capital' (1964:16). Secondly, the laborer is 'now seen as the *investor*, or at least as party to the investment scheme', and the results of the labourers' input moves beyond subsistence and into the realm once occupied solely by capitalists, that of surplus and gain. Fundamentally, in contrast to classical theory capital 'as it is being produced and exchanged, is meaningful and possible for both the capitalist and the laborer engaged in the production process' (Lin, 2001:12). Thirdly, since there is 'a potential reward in increased wages and other forms of profit, the laborer is now *motivated* to acquire skills and knowledge' (ibid:12). Finally, classical theory ties capital to the processes of 'production and exchange' (ibid:12). Human capital theory, in contrast, acknowledges gains for the labourer in terms of knowledge and skills, thus enabling the labourer to be in a position to invest and seek greater returns. Fundamentally, human capital sees the labourer not only as a person who works to produce commodities, but as an active agent with power to learn, negotiate conditions, and become an investor. This theory resonates not only with Freire's concept of agency (1972) but with the literature on hope which is explored in Chapter Six, 'Journey of Hope: Transference, Transition and Transformation'.

Portes defined 'human capital as a resource which 'resides in people's heads' (1998:7). The thesis that human capital rests with 'the individual laborer can be traced to Adam Smith' (Lin, 2001:8). Lin, however, credits 'the first systematic presentation of the human capital argument' (2001:8) to Theodore W. Schultz, specifically in relation to his address to the American Economic Association in 1961. In his address Schultz stated:

the failure to treat human resources explicitly as a form of capital, as a produced means of production, as the product of investment, has fostered the retention of the classical notion of labor as a capacity to do manual work requiring little knowledge and skill, a capacity with which, according to this notion, laborers are endowed about equally (1961:3).

His thesis is the antithesis of the classical capital theory as labourers have metamorphosed to become capitalists, through the 'acquisition of knowledge and skill that have economic value' (Shultz, 1961:3).

Human capital is located within the individual and is manifest through the acquisition of skills and knowledge that make it possible for the labourers to ‘demand from the capitalists payment beyond the exchange value for the their labour’ (Lin, 2001:8). Ultimately, human capital is the ‘added value embedded in the laborers themselves ... human capital is operationalised and measured by education, training, and experience’ (ibid:9). In Becker’s opinion expenditure on ‘education, training, medical care ‘are investments in human capital’ (1964:16).

According to Field, ‘the notion of human capital is well-known, both as a theoretical concept and as a policy concept which influences policy priorities’ (1999:238). Sergioivanni addresses the role of pedagogical leadership in relation to the development of human capital, specifically in the development of ‘social and academic capital for students, and intellectual and professional capital for teachers’ (1998: 37). Coleman analyses family background, contending that it can be sub-divided into financial, human, and social capital (1988: S109). Indeed Teachman et al. note that ‘financial and human capital correspond to the most commonly used conceptualizations of family background and have received much attention in the literature that considers schooling outcomes’ (1996:773). While financial and social capital adhere closely to Bourdieu’s model, human capital ‘is approximately measured by parents’ education and provides the potential for a cognitive environment for the child that aids learning’ (Coleman, 1988: S109).

Subcategories of capital continue to be defined as the field advances. Sergioivanni makes reference to intellectual, academic, and professional capital. He contends that school can develop academic capital by ‘becoming focused communities that cultivate a deep culture of teaching and learning’ (1998: 39). These focused communities create academic capital through ‘the rituals, norms, commitments and traditions’ and this capital ‘motivates and supports student learning and development’ (ibid: 39). He contends that schools ‘develop intellectual capital by becoming inquiring communities’ (ibid:39). He further defines intellectual capital as ‘the sum of what everyone in the school knows and shares that can help the school be more effective in enhancing the learning and development of students’ (ibid:39). Finally, he defines professional capital, created through a community of practice, where ‘members are concerned not only with their own practice but with the practice itself’ (ibid:40).

As previously noted, our understanding of capital as a theoretical construct is an emerging field and while this may pose some challenges as previously stated, definition and categorisation can only in the long term enhance understanding and support the development of frameworks of investigation.

#### **2.2.2.5 Capital, a summary**

This section explores the definition of capital and acknowledges the variations in its theoretical conceptualisation. While the theoretical field is evolving and needs to take cognisance of issues such as gender and the development of a shared understanding of definitions, it is nonetheless a useful framework to explore the social world. It is crucial to note that the individual capital forms are not stand-alone entities but affect each other. For example, Field contends that human capital activates social capital (2003:68), and Lin et al. define social capital as ‘the contextual complement to human capital’ (Lin et al. 2001:32). Furthermore, Putman states that ‘human capital and social capital are closely related ...’ (1995a: 667). Burt links social and human capital such that ‘social capital is the contextual complement to human capital’ (2001:32). The following table provides a visual summary of the different forms of capital and how this construct relates to the study.

**Table 2.1 Adaptation of a capital framework for this study**

Capital form	Definition	How it relates to this study
Economic Capital	Economic capital 'is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights' (Bourdieu 1986:243).	Poverty Unemployment Quality or ownership of Housing School and community buildings and assets
Symbolic Capital:  Cultural Capital is subdivided by Bourdieu into the following three dimensions	'cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications' (Bourdieu 1986:243).	
1. Embodied state	Embodied cultural capital is evident in the 'long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body' (Bourdieu, 1986:243).	Attitudes of parents teachers and children to learning. Learning aspirations
2. Objectified state	Objectified cultural capital is evident in the 'form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines etc.) (Bourdieu 1986:243).	Quality, quantity and availability of learning resources in the home, school, and community
3. Institutionalised state	Institutionalised cultural capital 'confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital it is presumed to guarantee' (1986: 243).	Link between accreditation and employment
Symbolic Capital: Social Capital	<p>'Social capital [is]made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility' (Bourdieu, 1986:243).</p> <p>'social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors' (Coleman, 1988:S98).</p> <p>Social capital entails 'features of social life-networks, norms, trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives' (Putman, 1995a, 665).</p>	<p>Networks</p> <p>Relationships</p> <p>Trust</p> <p>Partnership</p>
Human Capital	Human capital is located within the individual and is manifest through the acquisition of skills and knowledge that make it possible for the labourers to 'demand from the capitalists payment beyond the exchange value for their labour' (Lin, 2001: 8).	<p>Knowledge</p> <p>Skills</p> <p>Increased agency</p>

### 2.3 Ecological theory: Rationale and application

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model provides the second theoretical pillar in the socio-ecological framework. Bronfenbrenner identifies a number of specific systems within and between which people grow and develop. The ecological environment is conceived of as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, 'like a set of Russian dolls' (1979:3), and are typically represented as a set of concentric circles with a child figure at the centre. I draw on this model as it enabled an exploration of individual settings and systems and furthermore facilitated inquiry into the interconnections between them. The ecological framework prioritises the importance of contextual factors in the process of investigation and ultimately in the construction of knowledge. There are five individual systems, each of which I will now describe, and relate to this study, please refer to table 2.2 and to Appendix A.

The *microsystem* is the innermost system, the one closest to the developing child. In this study the innermost layer, the microsystem is understood as the three individual sites of home, school, and community. The degree of influence or impact of any one site on the individual is contingent upon the specific circumstances of the individual. However, the influence of the home is deemed primary, partly because young people spend approx 15% of their time in school between birth and the end of compulsory schooling, (Irish National Teachers' Organisation, (INTO), 1997:18) and also because the range of activities and life experiences in the home environment are more complex. Indeed, de Carvalho prioritises the impact of the home environment over that of the school and declining community contexts. She notes:

children move and develop principally between the contexts of the two (as other forms of community have become rare) families' functions are much more complex, and families are responsible for more than school is in terms of life experiences and education in the broad sense (2001:41).

The second layer, the *mesosystem*, relates to the relationship/interconnections between systems, i.e. the home, school, and community. This enables the exploration of the consequences of the nature and quality of relationships between sites. In this study, an investigation of the mesosystem is facilitated through an exploration of the experiences of working in partnership.

The third level, the *exosystem*, 'refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 25) but which nevertheless affect the circumstances or context in which the person grows. This is conceptualised as the decision-making levels of the education, housing, and social welfare systems. This system is examined through a discussion of issues such as poverty, housing, and education.

The fourth layer, the *macrosystem*, relates to the existence of subcultures within cultures. This layer is explored through an exploration of factors affecting the accessibility of learning within a working class culture, within which this study is located.

Finally the outermost layer, the *chronosystem*, acknowledges the time dimension associated with growth and development. The time dimension is understood in terms of the longitudinal nature of this study which chronicles the growth and development of KCP over a twenty year period. The impact of KCP on the lives of individuals and the three ecologies of home, school, and community is investigated with reference to the chronological dimension.



**Table 2.2      Adaptation of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological model to this study**

System	Definition	How it relates to this study
1. Microsystem	‘A pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:22)	Exploration of individual sites of home, school and community
2. Mesosystem	‘Interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:25)	Exploration of relationships between sites of home, school and community through the exploration of the theme of partnership.
3. Exosystem	‘An exosystem refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that are affected by what happens in the setting containing the developing person’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:25).	Analysis of how the education, housing and social welfare systems impact on peoples’ lives
4. Macrosystem	‘The macro system refers to consistencies in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist or could exist, at the level of the subculture of the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:26).	Recognition of working class culture
5. Chronosystem	This system encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to a child’s environments, Paquette and Ryan, <i>Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory</i> <a href="http://pt3.nl.edu/paquetteryanwebquest.pdf">http://pt3.nl.edu/paquetteryanwebquest.pdf</a> (accessed 24.02.2006)	Developmental processes and impact of KCP over time at both a structural and individual level.

Note: The Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem and Macrosystem represent environmental systems ‘that serve as contexts of development’ (Bronfenbrenner, 2005: 165). In comparison, the Chronosystem is a methodological construct which appertains to a particular type of ‘research design’ and thus ‘permits one to identify the impact of prior life events and experiences, singly or sequentially, on subsequent development’ (ibid:83).

## 2.4 Socio-ecological theory: Rationale and application

There are a number of advantages to adopting the two-dimensional theoretical framework to guide this study. Firstly, the adoption of capital theory informs the ‘socio’ dimension and enables a detailed examination of the lived experiences of the individual, an exploration of the consequences of being capital rich or capital poor, and a mechanism to understand how a person, or indeed a community may generate or deplete their supply of capital. If we accept the neo-classical concept in which we are actors, we consequently accept the potential to impact positively on our own, on an individual’s, family’s or on a community’s capital reserves. Secondly, Bronfenbrenner’s model of viewing the young person within and between contexts offers the opportunity to view human development in its most dynamic and interactive form. If a school subscribes to this understanding of human development it cannot, by implication, work in isolation from the home and community ecologies. Indeed, schools’ attempts to close the attainment gap ‘have been continually frustrated by factors lying largely outside schools’ (MacBeath et al. 2007:12). Within the American context Noddings examines school reform and finds that ‘it has long been clear that poor and minority children have often been ill-served by our public schools’ (2007:17). She argues for an ecological approach to intervention for poor students, stating that ‘the problems of many minority children are not confined to schooling. Children who live in substandard housing, have no health insurance, live with an overworked single parent, have a parent in prison, and may be periodically homeless or in state custody can hardly be expected to do well in school’ (ibid:17).

The school is therefore challenged to review how it operates as a service to learners, and how it functions in relation to the contexts of home, and community. If school staff embrace the cross-contextual ecological understanding they are more likely to work to ensure maximum cohesion and collaboration between sites to support positive learning outcomes.

Shortt et al. in their study concerned with understanding how schools become empowered; empowerment being defined as, ‘a process whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems’ (1994: 38), identified a number of key characteristics which affected the ability of schools participating in the project to develop an empowerment culture. True to Bronfenbrenner’s model, the most successful schools, labelled ‘opportunity

schools’, to embrace empowerment, exhibited an ability to work collaboratively with other sites and viewed the student from an ecological perspective. According to the study these empowered schools, ‘reduced the boundaries between school and community’ (ibid: 50). Furthermore, these empowered schools viewed the student holistically; ‘the student was seen within the context of the community in which the student lived and the school existed’ (ibid: 50). Bronfenbrenner’s observations of the distinct worlds inhabited by children is acknowledged by McCaleb who problematises the relationship between the school and out of school contexts, and warns of the implications for children when there are poor relationships between the home and the school (1994). Flor Ada, in her introduction to McCaleb’s work notes that ‘children live their lives in two worlds; that of the home and community and that of the school. When these two worlds fail to know, respect, and celebrate each other, children are placed in a difficult position’ (1994: vii). Henry too is convinced that schools cannot work in isolation from the broader community, noting that, ‘schools cannot do their work in isolation from parents, community agencies, industry, business, and universities’ (1996:15). Indeed, in Ireland the Department of Education and Science (DES) recognise the central importance of adopting an ecological approach to address learning accessibility conscious that ‘many of the barriers of the educational progress of children and young people are caused by issues outside the educational system’ and consequently advocates a partnership approach to addressing learning accessibility (2005: 16).

## **2.5 Ecologies: Introduction**

This section investigates the factors affecting the accessibility of learning within the three individual ecologies of home, school, and community. The nature and quality of the relationship between sites is subsequently investigated through an exploration of the theme of partnership.

### **2.5.1 Home context**

The home is a key site of learning in and of itself. Its influence in determining the child’s predisposition to learning extends beyond the home environment and into the worlds of school and community. Indeed the DES recognise the centrality of the home environment stating that ‘by the time the child enters school, the home has made a contribution to her/his development which will significantly affect the child’s subsequent performance in school’ (1995:139). As Epstein succinctly states, ‘all the

years that children attend school, they also attend home' (1990: 99). This section affirms the centrality of the home as a key site of child development, conscious of the complexity of researching home contexts. Influenced by a post-modern interpretation of family, I acknowledge the prevalence of diverse home variables such as family practices, family composition, and culture. I proceed to explore parent related factors including aspirations and prior school experiences. Subsequently I examine poverty, class, and home/school dynamics.

Barbour et al. contend that 'most families, given reasonable conditions, develop along healthy lines and rear children who respect a home culture and get ready to meet the world' (1997:113). What are these 'reasonable conditions' alluded to? What are the consequences of inadequate preparation to 'meet the world'? How does a capital-rich environment differ from a capital-poor environment in enabling the accessibility of learning? To what extent do negative experiences in one context impact on the other? Conaty, along with Kellaghan et al. recognise the negative long-term implications for the child who emerges from the home context ill-prepared to meet the demands of school. Conaty contends that, 'a reduced ability to cope within the home and community' creates oppression and perpetuates 'the cycle of disadvantage, early school leaving, and educational failure' (2002:20). According to Kellaghan et al., the child who starts school 'poorly prepared to learn' is poorly placed to achieve within the educational system, indeed they contend that 'in the absence of adequate familial and social supports, the school will not do its job very well' (1993:14). hooks embraces the ecological perspective when she simply states that crisis in families creates an educational crisis (2003:117).

Researching family contexts is complex. It is a challenging task to isolate and understand specific factors within the home environment which affect accessibility of learning. Schneider, in her review of small-scale studies exploring the effects of parental practices on child attainment, acknowledges the inherent challenges in researching the home environments. She states that, 'it is nearly impossible to control for variations in family resources such as income, parent education, family composition, or the effects of racial and ethnic discrimination' (1993:7). Coleman challenges researchers to move beyond quantifiable measures such as parental educational attainment, usually measured in years of formal schooling of the mother, and family income, to a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the

dynamics of the home environment (1998:10). In other words, his challenge is to move beyond defining 'who parents are to what parents do' (ibid:144). Davies underlines Coleman's concern and contends that it is 'what families do (rather than what demographic groups they fall into) affects children's learning' (1991: 379). Likewise Kellaghan et al. claim that 'it is what parents do in the home rather than their status that is important' (1993:145). Finally Clark contends that it is the 'overall quality of family's life-style, not the composition, or status, or some subset of family process dynamics, that determines whether children are prepared for academically competent performance in the classroom' (1983:1).

While to some extent I empathise with the concerns of the researchers above and their advocacy to move beyond easily measurable factors such as parental educational attainment or income to a more holistic understanding of home dynamics and practices, I also have some concerns at what appears to be an oversimplification of a very complex reality. Indeed, I accept that their theories offer a stimulating and refreshing challenge to traditional research but I believe parental practices are influenced by the very quantifiable measures that Coleman and others are drawing us away from. Surely, it is conceivable that the educational levels and income of parents affects their parenting practices. Educational attainment is closely related to employment prospects, which is in turn related to income, and consequently resources and networks. Parental educational attainment is a very important measure. If we are to gain an appreciation and an understanding of the impact of the home environment on the child we must gain an insight into the relationship between the quantifiable variables such as income and educational levels and the family dynamics, with due consideration of other contextual factors such as culture and parental attributes.

I will now proceed with a discussion of the centrality and diversity of home environments. The range of variables within the home context that influence accessibility of learning is considerable. Home factors affecting accessibility of learning are firstly conceptualised in terms of parental characteristics. These include parental attributes which influence the parent's capacity to shepherd children through the formal learning system. Secondly, contextual factors such as poverty, socio economic status, and class factors are considered.

### 2.5.1.1 Centrality of home environment

The home is a key site for child development, it is ‘the basic setting within which children are introduced to social living’ (Schaffer, 2004:87) and while it is a ‘training ground for community, it is the place where we are first given a sense of the meaning and power of education’ (hooks, 2003:117). According to Flynn ‘the ability of a child to benefit from the educational system or, on the contrary to be disadvantaged within this system, is most likely to be established at the time of conception’ (2007: 91).

Fundamentally, the responsibility to meet the child’s emotional, physical, and learning needs, resides within the family. According to Wolfendale the family plays a central and complex role for the child as it ‘offers a model for identification, a source of protection and target of attachment, a setting wherein he or she will receive information and guidance, a place in which skills can be gradually acquired and competence achieved’ (1992:21).

The impact of home experiences for children extends beyond the home environment, and into the world of community and school. Henry notes that ‘the culture of the home has been shown to be of critical importance in preparing children for success or failure in the world of school and work’ (1996:94). Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publication ‘*Parents as Partners in Schooling*’ confirms the unique responsibility of parents in relation to ‘early socialisation’ and ‘laying down a mental and emotional framework which can be built on by school and community when they move out into the world’ (1997:15).

MacBeth and Ravn acknowledge the strategic importance of the home environment in laying the foundations for future learning, noting that ‘*common sense* tells us that children learn a great deal in the family - for good or for ill - and that parents play a significant part as educators of their own children from birth onwards’ (1994:2). Furthermore, Kellaghan et al. contend that ‘home factors ... play a role in school success or failure’ (1993:29). They acknowledge the centrality of the home since it ‘provides the most permanent environment and point of reference for children’ (ibid:9). In addition, they believe that the impact of community and neighbourhood factors is ‘mediated primarily through their influence on the family’ (ibid:1). Clark contends that children ‘receive essential “survival knowledge” for competent classroom role enactment from their exposure to positive home attitudes and communication encounters’ (1983:1).

Boldt's research with teachers in the Irish educational system affirms the centrality of the home experience in relation to school performance. He found that teachers believed children who came from what they described as 'deprived homes' displayed 'a lack of general knowledge and skills necessary to get on in school' (1994:24). Henderson and Berla highlight the central role of the home in creating a positive learning environment. In their meta analysis of 66 studies which explored the relationship between family characteristics and student achievement they found that the most accurate predictor of student's achievement was neither 'income or social status but the extent to which the family was able to':

1. Create a home environment that encourages learning;
  2. Express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers;
  3. Become involved in their children's education at school and in community.
- (1994:1)

Interestingly Henderson and Berla identified a pivotal role for schools in facilitating the home to create these learning conditions and concluded that:

when schools support families to develop these three conditions children from low-income families and diverse cultural backgrounds approach the grades and test scores expected for middle-class children (1994:1).

There is absolutely no doubt the home environment is crucial in providing 'a positive foundation' (hooks, 2003: 118) for learning within the formal school system. One of the concerns of this thesis therefore, is to gain an understanding of the home environment and to expose the factors which empower or inhibit parents as active agents in supporting their children's learning.

### **2.5.1.2 Diversity of family contexts**

A combination of internal and external factors creates diverse home environments. Macbeth and Ravn acknowledge the diversity of internal characteristics such as:

size of the family, the wealth or poverty of the family, harmony or tension, love or lack of it, physical circumstances ... educational influences such as books in the house, encouragement from parents, examples of brothers and sisters, access to television, moral and religious values and social attitudes' (1994:2).

They also acknowledge the impact of external factors such as ‘the community in which the home is situated’ (1994:2). These diverse factors impact on the parent’s capacity to support the child’s learning and to respond to school expectations.

Conscious of the expectations schools have of parental involvement de Carvalho profiles the formidable barriers which may exist for parents who wish to become involved with their children’s education. These include among others, family structure, parental educational levels, poverty, and economics. She challenges schools to consider the circumstances in which families are living. In particular she challenges schools to take on board the constraints on:

single parents, working mothers, ethnic and language minority families, low-educated, handicapped, and chronically ill parents, those with a great number of children, in poverty, as well as those working irregular, night, and double shifts all of whom have time constraints and limited skills and resources, and who add up to the majority of parents of public schools (2001:98).

### **2.5.1.3 Family practices**

The OECD publication ‘*Parents as Partners in schooling*’, highlights some of the differences in family practices and expectations. These differences include individual parent’s single-minded concern for their own children, ‘... some parents may only be interested in the well-being of their own children, and perhaps be in favour of various forms of segregation’ (1997:16) as well as economic, cultural and religious variables. Furthermore, parents may not want ‘... their children being educated ‘up’ out of the local community; if they belong to an ethnic minority, they may not want to become a homogeneous part of the country’s mainstream culture’ (ibid:16). Increasingly, teachers in Ireland work within a rich diverse cultural context as our increasingly diverse population is reflected in the school population. This in itself offers potential for learning. As Davies advises, ‘cultural differences are not diseases to be treated but healthy opportunities for learning’ (1991:378).

Not alone does parental involvement in education vary between homes and cultures, it may also vary within an individual home. There may be belief systems that prioritises one child’s educational achievement above another, based on perceived ability, gender, or position in family. Parental involvement in education, manifested through home and school practices, may vary within the school life span of an individual child. Parents may believe that they ‘should begin to disengage from adolescents’ (Eccles and Harold, 1996:9) as they move through Secondary school.



Boldt's research, located within the Irish context of early school leavers, found that 'most parents expressed the view that when their children reach the age of fifteen, there is little they can do if their children have their minds set on something' (1994:23). Diminishing parental involvement may also originate from 'a decrease in parents' feelings of efficacy as their children grow older' (Eccles and Harold, 1996:10). Parents may also be more inclined 'to help a child who is having trouble than a child who is doing very well' (ibid:10). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler distil factors affecting parents' decisions to become involved in their children's education into three constructs. Firstly, the way in which parent constructs their role as parent. Secondly, 'parents' sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school' (1997:31). Thirdly, 'parents' perceptions of the general invitations, demands and opportunities for involvement presented by children and their schools' (ibid:31).

#### **2.5.1.4 Family composition**

In our post modern western world children grow up in ever increasingly complex family structures, where they may have limited access to both parents and also to the support networks of their extended families. Acknowledging the emergence of diverse family structures Schaffer advises that 'families can be no longer narrowly defined as was once assumed' (2004:87). Olsen and Fuller also address the complexity of family structures where:

students may be from homes headed by single parents, foster parents, grandparents, or gay/lesbian parents; the family may practice a non-traditional religion or speak a language other than English in the home; the family may be "intact" or "blended" (2003: 2).

Elkind conceptualises this change in family structures, as a move from the modern to the post-modern family. According to his model the modern family was characterised by kinship, in which the nuclear family was made up of:

two parents, with one working and one staying home to care for the children-has been regarded as the end of an evolutionary progression toward an ideal family form ... it came to be regarded as the regular or 'normal' family form, the standard against which all other family structures had to be measured (1995:11).

According to Elkind, the modern family is characterised by romantic love, the idea that there was just one person in the world for each of us, maternal love, the idea that 'mothers have an instinctive need to love and care for their children' (1995:11).

Finally the modern family is characterised by domesticity, the idea ‘that each family member owes primary allegiance to the home’ (ibid:11). Children were ‘seen as innocent and in need of parental guidance, limit-setting and protection’ (ibid:11).

In Elkind’s post-modern construct, the family is seen as permeable. The nuclear family is but ‘one of many different family forms, each of which can provide high-quality child rearing’ (1995: 12). In the new construct, the permeable family, romantic love has given way to consensual love, the sentiment of maternal love has been replaced by shared parenting, and finally urbanity has replaced domesticity, where ‘the boundaries between home and workplace, public and private life, and child and adult are more open and flexible than they were during the modern era’ (ibid:12). Children are also viewed differently, they are seen as ‘competent, ready and able to deal with all of life’s vicissitudes’ (ibid:13). Elkind locates this new conceptualisation of children firmly in the *need* of post-modern parents to have competent children, who can deal with, ‘out-of-home child care from an early age, who can cope with divorce, and who will be left unfazed by seeing people murdered in the streets or behaving wildly on drugs’ (ibid:13).

These two scenarios present different conceptualisations of family, different lifestyles, different parenting patterns, and different conceptions of childhood. What is certain is that the ‘changing family norms ensure that the traditional nuclear family is less common than heretofore’ (Lodge et al., 2004:8). Elkind, conscious of the romanticisation of the nuclear family within a changing understanding of ‘family’ concept, recognises that while ‘the nuclear family kinship structure may be the least stressful in present day society, this is true only in so far as the family is emotionally healthy and financially secure. Many nuclear families are far from the ideal, while many non-nuclear families do an excellent job of child rearing’ (1995:12).

However, changing family structures can generate stress for families as a whole and for children, and challenge services such as schools to review how they interpret ‘family’. Kelleghan et al. conclude that ‘the decline in the extended family and the growth of one parent families mean that children may not have the access that children in the past had to a range of persons to guide and assist their development’ (1993:15). Comer acknowledges the stress experienced by families and contends that such conditions can ‘lead to frustration, disappointment, apathy, withdrawal, anger, and acting out on the part of students, parents, teachers, and administrators’

(1986:444). Powell highlights the stressful consequences of ‘rapid social, cultural, and economic changes’ (1991:314) which result in ‘a reduction of the role of the family as an educational environment and nurturing system’ (1991:314). Henry, while acknowledging the diversity of family circumstances encourages the school system to view the variety of new family structures in a creative and appreciative way rather than viewing them ‘from a deficit perspective’ (1996:107). On a progressive note, Mc Caleb views the diversity of care-giving adults in a child’s life, including grandparents and foster parents, ‘not as a disintegration, but a reinterpretation of family’ (1994:5). Family structures have changed, and there is no doubt that this has implications for schools both in terms of working with children and with their families.

#### **2.5.1.5 Changes in families: Implications for schools**

The home environment is not an isolated ecology in which the child grows and develops. Many statutory institutions, including health, justice and educational services interact with families. Schools traditionally work with children directly and with families by association. As Connell et al. succinctly state, ‘at the simplest level; home and school are linked by the encounters that family members have with the school staff’ (1982:51). Epstein encourages educators to reflect on their ‘explicit or implicit contact with their students’ families’ (2001:4) and to work from an informed insight into family culture and belief systems which they encounter daily since ‘however configured, however constrained, families come with their children to school’ (ibid: 4). She contends that schools are directly exposed to family cultures and beliefs, through ‘children’s minds and hearts and hopes and dreams’ and through ‘children’s problems and promise’ (ibid:4).

Teachers who wish to understand children and build proactive relationships between homes and the school need to gain an understanding of the topography of home contexts. According to Olsen and Fuller it is ‘imperative that teachers go beyond classroom walls to understand the relationship between family and schools’ (2003:2). Powell, conscious of the need for ‘more demographic data to make informed decisions on how to respond to the new realities of family life’ (1991:309), warns educators against the danger of branding families since:

It is risky to assume that a family demographic characteristic (e.g., dual-earner or single parent household) is associated with a qualitative dimension of family functioning (for example the amount of time spent with child on homework) without empirical data indicating specific types of family structures and process linkages (1991:309).

Gregory strongly acknowledges the duty of teachers to be cognisant of children's culture and to gain an in-depth understanding of existing literacy knowledge in families as a route to equality. She notes '... if real equality is to be promoted, we surely need to know which cultural practices young children know about both before and outside school' (2000:116). Fundamentally, teachers need to understand the context of children's lives so that they can effectively build a learning environment with which the child can identify.

#### **2.5.1.6 Discontinuity between home and school**

Children emerge with knowledge, skills, and attitudes from the home context and bring them into the school and community environments. According to Conaty 'success in adapting to a new environment will depend on the ability of the individual to transfer learning' (1999:21). Kellaghan et al. address the impact of transferability of skills between sites and contend that the quality and nature of learning prior to school attendance affects scholastic outcomes:

When the characteristics developed at home do not support school learning, it seems reasonable to conclude that the resultant discontinuity experienced by the children when they go to school will affect their scholastic performance (1993:18).

The school and community contexts may mirror children's prior experiences, thus offering a level of continuity in terms of culture and values. Alternatively, the school environment may present a discontinuity of experience, and consequently poor matching of competencies between environments, thereby disadvantaging children from their early years. Tormey proposes a radical reconceptualisation of how educational disadvantage is understood. Rejecting the traditional medical model, which views educational disadvantage 'as a disease' which resides in the individual, he argues that educational disadvantage is brought about by 'a series of active processes' (1999:29). Tormey identifies discontinuity between the home and school environments as one of the processes by which children are disadvantaged (ibid:42). Indeed, discontinuity and disconnection may be experienced by both children and parents. According to Lareau, 'the standards of schools are not neutral; their requests for parental involvement may be laden with social and cultural experiences of intellectual and economic elite' (1987:74). Discontinuity and poor transferability of

skills across contexts harbour serious implications for young learners. According to Macbeth and Ravn, ‘the social-constructivist theory of learning argues that we build up our understanding and store of knowledge on the basis of previous experiences’ (1994:6). If these previous experiences are either invisible or considered subservient to the prevailing school culture the child emerging from working class contexts is systematically disadvantaged by a school which does not recognise, celebrate, and reflect his or her culture.

In her recent study Cregan noted that within the three designated disadvantaged schools in her study, ‘many children are entering our school system without having the proficiency in the type of language expected and required to engage effectively with the system’ (2007:184). Fundamentally, the language which served them within their home contexts did not match the requirements of the school setting. Sylva notes that children from ‘low income homes are at a disadvantage compared to wealthier peers in their capacity to adjust to and master the curriculum of primary school’ (2000:122). Furthermore, Henry believes that the school system ‘typically affirms the language and culture of the middle and upper classes’ (1996:99). She believes that ‘students may experience a radical disjuncture between home and school life’ (ibid:102). de Carvalho affirms the snug fit between the middle class home and the school context. She states that ‘... there is identity and continuity of values and practices among middle-class parents and education professionals...’ (2001:98). She contends that the mismatch between middle class and working class contexts affects not only the child’s adaptability in the school environment, but also the attitudes of teachers within the school system. According to de Carvalho:

the free time, money, cultural resources, and social networks of the middle class contribute to the productive match between home and school facilitating parents’ interactions with teachers, working class culture promotes separation between home and school, limiting opportunities for collaboration and lowering teachers’ expectations for students (ibid:15).

According to Kellaghan et al. ‘homes vary in the extent to which they foster knowledge, skills, and dispositions that support school learning’ (1993:18). Discontinuity between home and school is identified as one of the foundation stones of educational disadvantage, and tragically, ‘disadvantage manifests itself in school in poor educational performance’ (ibid:28). McAllister Swap contends that children may be systematically disadvantaged by a school system where ‘children with backgrounds that are racially, linguistically, or culturally different form their

teachers' may experience discontinuity in values between home and school or may lose self-esteem as they see little of their own history and culture represented and taught in the curriculum' (1993:16).

This discontinuity of worlds and lack of acknowledgement of the child's lived experiences beyond the school can and does contribute to the child's disenchantment with school and failure to succeed within the educational system. In *Whiddin to the Gauras*, a research study of the Irish traveller community by traveller researchers, the discontinuity of experience for children between their home and school lives emerges as a key theme within the research findings, 'the school world did not appear to be connected with the Traveller child's world' (Gormally, 2005:125).

Kellaghan et al. recommend that 'children's discontinuity can be eased in at least two ways' (1993:25). Firstly, they recommend that the 'overlap in home and school experiences can be increased so as to reduce the extent of the discontinuity' (ibid:25). This very much echoes Epstein's concept of creating 'school-like families' (2001:32). Furthermore, Wescott Dodd and Konzal contend 'that what parents do at home to support the school's efforts is a major influence on how well children do in school' (2002:248), further supporting the argument for closer correlation between contexts. Kellaghan et al.'s second strategy is 'to demonstrate to children how knowledge and skills acquired at home can be applied in the context of school' (1993:26), again, echoing Epstein's model of family-like schools (2001:32). This is a radical approach for a number of reasons. Firstly, it respects home and school cultures, which is not often the case since home cultures and contexts are rarely acknowledged as rich and authentic learning environments. Secondly, it proposes that adults in both sites not only have something to contribute but also something to learn from each other.

I have established the centrality of the home environment in the life experience of the child, discussed diversity within home contexts, and the impact of discontinuity between home and school settings. I will now look specifically at parental characteristics which affect parents' capacity to support their children on their formal learning journeys.

### **2.5.1.7 Parental attributes**

The parents' ability to play a proactive role in preparing the child for school and in helping them negotiate their educational journey is dependent on many factors including their own prior school experience and educational attainment, their understanding of their roles as parents and their access to networks, resources and supports, all of which can be understood within a socio-ecological framework. Conscious of this key role played by parents, Schaefer contends that 'increased knowledge and consciousness of the roles of parents as educators and of children as future educators are needed to guide the development of parent education' (1991:239).

### **2.5.1.8 High aspirations, unequal outcomes**

An investigation and acknowledgement of the learning aspirations of parents and young people is central to this thesis. It would be futile to engage in intervention work if it was not designed to answer the unmet aspirations of young learners and their parents.

Parental lack of care or value for education is regularly cited as a cause for educational failure, specifically in relation to working class parents. However, difference between middle class and working class parents emerges not in the aspirations they have for their children but in the resources available to them to operationalise their aspirations. Significant differences also emerge in the educational outcomes for children. According to Seaman et al. 'the capacity to fulfil aspirations is highly dependent on the availability of resources' (2005:80). Their thesis resonates strongly with the capital framework developed earlier in this chapter. Availability of resources to support the child's development is to a large extent dependent on the level of capital within the home, school, and community ecologies.

Wolfendale, among others, challenges the negative perception of working class parents by stating that all parents do care about their children, but sometimes life pressures, both financial and personal, get in the way of manifesting that care. These pressures can also be interpreted as a dearth of economic and human capital resources:

All parents care about their children's welfare and well being. There is sufficient evidence that a tiny minority of parents who appear not to care are those who at the time are over whelmed by stressful life-events and financial pressures and whose own experience of schooling was not positive enough for them to overcome fears and anxieties about school and teachers (1992:7).

Ryan, national co coordinator of the 8-15 Early school leavers initiative,<sup>1</sup> acknowledges the high aspirations of parents for their children, 'parents invariably wished their children to remain in and complete school, even if they themselves had left school' (2004:80). Ryan's findings are not unique in this field. International research agrees with Ryan's thesis, confirming high educational aspirations among all parents irrespective of background. For example Seaman et al.'s research attests to the high expectations of parents who wanted their children to 'have a better life than they had' (2005:69). They noted that parents 'saw doing well in education and employment as key to doing better' (ibid:70). This argument acknowledges the aspirations of parents and highlights their value for human capital. Epstein found that 'both more and less well educated parents have similar goals to those of the school for their children's education' (2001:36). She believes the difference among parents lies in the 'knowledge of how to help their children at home, their belief that teachers want them to assist their children at home, and the degree of information and guidance from their children's teachers on how to help them at home' (ibid:36), again strongly resonating with the value for human capital. Wrigley, in the introduction to Lareau's research work, concludes that 'working-class and middle-class parents share this desire to help. Where they differ is in the type and number of resources they bring to the task and the range of actions they perceive as appropriate' (2000:vii). The foregoing arguments resonate strongly within the previously defined socio-ecological framework that recognises the impact of the prevalence and forms of capital residing within and across ecological contexts.

Sleeter confronts the stereotypical characterisation of working class parents as uninterested in their children's learning stating that 'contrary to stereotypes, low income parents and inner city parents *do* care very deeply about their children's education' (1996:x). Mc Caleb, drawing on her extensive experience working with minority groups acknowledges parents' high aspirations for their children, 'these

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<sup>1</sup> The 8-15 early school leavers initiative was established by the Department of Education in 1998. It aimed to retain young people within the school system by providing in school and out of school supports. Each of the projects was managed by a consortia of stakeholders including schools, voluntary and statutory organisations. This is now part of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme.



parents, like most parents everywhere, have high aspirations for their children as well as a desire to promote the family's culture to their children' (1994:xi). Furthermore, Atkinson acknowledges that some parents experience personal failure within the educational system, and consequently lack of confidence and skill to help their own children, which could be interpreted as a dearth of embodied cultural capital. However, he contends that this does not take from their desire to support their children as he believes that 'every parent is fiercely concerned for their child's future and will do what they can to influence it positively' (1994:39).

Olsen and Fuller, conscious of cultural difference, caution teachers against the danger of misinterpreting the aspirations of low-income parents, and alludes to the different lived experiences of teachers and parents; 'in establishing a working partnership with low-income parents, you must remember that lack of resources doesn't indicate a lack of love or dreams for their children' (2003:282). In Daly and Leonard's study parents acknowledged their early school leaving and poor educational attainment but hoped their own children would stay in school and achieve (2002). School achievement was linked to greater employability and life satisfaction: 'Parents wanted their children to succeed in terms of gaining a good education and a good job' (2002:114). Daly and Leonard also affirm the significant barriers which exist to impede the fulfilment of those aspirations:

...the majority of parents to whom we talked took their parental role very seriously and went to considerable lengths to try and set a good example to their children. However, the wider structural disadvantages which they face limit their capacity to provide their children with the necessary resources (ibid:85).

A brief examination of the literature on children's learning aspirations confirms that working-class children also displayed high aspirations. The long-term impact of school achievement is not lost on young people themselves. Ryan in her work with marginalized young people noted that, 'each of the children interviewed was acutely aware that staying in school constituted currency for the future' (2004:80). Ryan in her research with young people involved in the 8-15 Early School Leavers Initiative (ESLI) found that the younger cohort of children identified a variety of desirable future careers which 'included a solicitor, a footballer, an air hostess, a boxer, a doctor a dancer or a singer' (ibid:80). Significantly the older children she interviewed had abandoned this broad spectrum to opt for the 'bland and practical' (ibid:81). Daly and Leonard, in their study of families in poverty in Ireland also explored children's

aspirations and found that ‘... many children remain committed to obtaining a ‘good’ education ... dreams and optimism were much in evidence when discussion turned to their preferred jobs (2002:140). Seaman et al.’s research in Scotland showed similar high aspirations. Their research found that ‘just under half of the young people hoped to go to university, which in view of their backgrounds is sadly a proportion unlikely to be fulfilled’ (2005:71).

In Chapter Five, ‘Area Profile’, I build an educational profile of the study area in by drawing on statistical data. It is graphically evident that outcomes and achievement do not reflect the uniformity of aspirations across class groupings. Realistically, in spite of high aspirations, attainment outcomes differ radically.

#### **2.5.1.9 Parents’ childhood school experiences: Legacy or atonement**

An understanding of parents’ personal experiences of schooling is of fundamental importance in relation to understanding parents’ capacity to support the child’s learning in the home as well as their capacity to work collaboratively with the school. Parents themselves were once students and all too often they carry negative memories from their own school days, which may impact on their capacity and ability to get involved with their children’s schools (Barbour et al., 1997). Indeed according to Wescott Dodd and Konzal, ‘for parents whose own experiences were very painful, the school can be an unwelcoming or fearful place’ (2002:15).

Parental reticence and lack of skills or confidence is compounded when parents are ‘called to the school only when there is a problem with their child’ (Comer, 1986: 444), when their own prior negative experiences may be recalled or relived. Additionally, Comer contends that parents ‘are afraid that their children will perform poorly and reflect badly on them as parents’ (ibid:444). Negative experiences from childhood can transfer into parenting practices in adult life. Firstly, they may form a hindrance to participation in life-long learning opportunities for adults themselves. Secondly, they can act as a barrier to adults in supporting their own children’s learning whether in the home or in collaboration with the school. Finally, the negative attitudes incurred through negative experiences may be transferred to the child.

While prior school experiences impact on parental behaviour it is important not to assume negative experiences automatically translate into negative attitudes and poor

parental practices. Parents with negative childhood experiences within the educational system may very well be highly motivated and work proactively to ensure their own children have more positive experiences and outcomes. While negative childhood experiences may form subsequent barriers, it does not mean that they are insurmountable, it does, however, mean that they create challenging contexts.

An appreciation of the personal, intergenerational, and long-term impact of negative school experiences holds the potential to motivate and inform educators to prevent a recurrence of similar experiences, and to address this legacy through pro-active positive engagement with parents. When teachers are conscious that ‘parents and community members have feelings and attitudes about school that date back to their own childhoods[and that] parents who had unpleasant school experiences are often reluctant to become involved with their children’s schools’ (Barbour et al., 1997:319) they will work from an informed perspective.

Negative childhood school experiences may be further compounded by negative experiences in the role of parent or caregiver, which can be manifested in a number of ways. Firstly, on a personal level, parents may feel vulnerable, disempowered, and uneducated in their interactions with individual teachers. Secondly, at a structural level, they feel alienated by ‘the impenetrable cloak of the professional educator’s jargon and terminology’ (Henry, 1996:140). Mc Caleb also acknowledges the personal barriers which exist for parents who ‘feel ill equipped to give the needed support at home’ and the school based barriers when parents ‘feel ignored or criticized by the school when they try to advocate for their child’ (1994: xi).

It is of prime importance therefore that educators acknowledge that parental attitudes may be forged through their prior school learning experiences and consequently to work proactively to enhance their experiences of the educational system as adults. Epstein views the relationships between home and school, specifically manifested through parental involvement in the school, as a mutable variable and recognises the potential for parents, students, and school staff to contribute to either the growth or deterioration in the quality of interaction (2001:35).

The phenomenon of poor teacher-parent relationships is not confined to working class contexts. Wescott Dodd, and Konzal contend that ‘parents at both ends of the social spectrum’ can ‘approach teachers inappropriately’, thus creating a lost opportunity for building partnership and collaboration between sites. They acknowledge how parents from low socio-economic backgrounds might feel dis-empowered in the face of the professional, and in contrast how parents with professions, accustomed to being in positions of power might challenge teachers without showing due respect for the work they do:

Parents at both ends of the socio-economic continuum approach teachers inappropriately. Parents from working-class backgrounds feeling disempowered in their relationships with educators may resort to angry outbursts ... professional parents, used to dealing with others from a power position, have no qualms about questioning teachers (2002:149)

Drudy and Lynch interrogate the cliché that ‘... parents you really want to see never come to parent-teacher meetings’ (1993:154). They identify parental reticence as a direct outcome of poor school experiences as well as a lack of knowledge as to the purposes of the meetings organised by schools. If teachers and schools recognise the multiplicity of reasons parents might be reticent to come to individual meetings, participate in school programmes or meetings, and go some way to addressing those factors through the proactive development of a welcoming school climate which acknowledges the significant role played by parents in their children’s lives, they may very well begin a process of healing, atonement, and empowerment.

Within the home context parents who have academic related skills, knowledge, and competencies have the option of using them to support their children’s learning. Furthermore, they have experiential knowledge of how the educational system works and this familiarity carries with it a knowledge base denied to people who have not been as successful academically. According to Lareau, the nature of middle class parent networks facilitate sharing of valuable information. Furthermore, Schaefer identifies different belief systems in relation to sharing of information and communication styles between less and more educated parents, finding that ‘less educated and minority parents emphasize the need for family privacy and believe that information on the child’s home is unnecessary for the teacher’ (1991:241).

I have discussed how parental aspirations and prior school experiences impact on the level of support for the child’s learning within the home environment and between the home and school environments. I will now explore contextual factors affecting the

home's capacity to support the child's learning. All of these factors can be interpreted through a capital lens. I will now discuss poverty, class, and capital in relation to their impact on the capacity of the home environment to support learning.

#### **2.5.1.10 The impact of home ecological factors continued: Poverty and class**

In the previous section I have discussed variables such as parental characteristics and family practices all of which affect the efficacy of the home to promote or impede accessibility of learning. The capacity of the home to act as a proactive nurturing agent in relation to child development and consequently learning accessibility is also compromised by factors such as poverty and class.

#### **2.5.1.11 Poverty in the home**

In this section I explore the issue of poverty and relate it to the accessibility of learning. The impact of poverty is evident within all levels of capital, economic, cultural and social. Kellaghan et al. link the family's dearth of economic resources to the child's ability to 'benefit fully from educational provision' (1995:30). Tragically, the implications of being born into a poor household may last a lifetime. The OECD publication '*Parents as Partners in Schooling*' highlights the consequences of economic strain on the capacity of parents to fulfil their supportive role and ultimately their constitutional brief:

Poverty and unemployment make the parents' task more difficult - and economic pressures may still be intense when parents are employed. Low wages or fear of losing a job may lead to overwork - and when both parents are working, they may be too tired to support their children emotionally or educationally (1997:25).

Schneider and Coleman agree with the OECD report and contend that the lack of capital may inhibit parents from operationalising their expectations for their children:

Not all parents have the same resources or opportunities to act on the educational expectations they have for their children. Variations in financial and social resources, such as money to purchase a home computer or adequate childcare, factor into parents' decisions about the actions they take regarding their children's education (1993:1).

Living in poverty impacts on the quality of a person's life and their lifelong prospects. Rabrenovic found that living in poverty is stressful and impacts on well-being, education, housing, and resources (1995:81). Seaman et al. contend that 'children living in poverty do experience many restrictions as their parents cannot afford to pay for the same level of material goods or activities as others ...' (2005:6).

According to Olsen and Fuller ‘poverty dims the future and creates stress and anxiety in the present. It limits opportunities and prospects’ (2003:277). They define the effects of poverty by contrasting them with the privileges money can buy. These privileges include, good food, safe and decent shelter, opportunities to learn, reduction in stress and conflict, a decent neighbourhood to live in, health care, healthy recreation, transportation, communication and economic opportunity (ibid:278). Weinger also attests to the long-term effects of poverty, she contends that ‘childhood poverty also may lead to lower wages and productivity during adulthood by subtly lowering an individual’s basic skills, and ability to learn on the job...’ (1998:321).

Living in poverty has a number of associated risks. Daly and Leonard, identify three possible risks faced by children living in poverty. Firstly the risk of ‘exclusion from the social world of their peers’ (2002:202), secondly the risk of either ‘leaving school early or not achieving their full potential’ (ibid:202), and finally the risk of ‘growing up in a harsh environment and of turning to drugs, joy-riding and, additionally for girls, (early) lone motherhood’ (ibid:202). The lack of resources in the home may manifest itself in the most unsuspecting ways. For example, Daly and Leonard found that young people come under peer pressure to ‘wear the ‘right’ runners or have the ‘right’ schoolbag’ (ibid:146). They found that the inability of families to facilitate their children to ‘match the consumer possessions of peers’ could place young people under pressure. Furthermore, they may be subject to both physical and verbal abuse from their peers that in turn can lead to a disengagement with school. Similarly, Boldt’s research linked poverty to early school leaving, citing examples of children leaving the school system to go on ‘courses’ which offer them an allowance. This allowance was used to ‘buy jeans and runners and go to the discos’, and the young people’s decision to leave school is closely related to the economic status of their families who are often ‘in debt and can barely afford to pay for uniforms and books’ (Boldt, 1994:23). According to Le Compte and Dworkin ‘researchers have long identified the relationship between the degree of poverty experienced by children and their tendency to drop out of school’ (1991:60).

### **2.5.1.12 Impact of home poverty on learning accessibility**

Poverty in the home is compounded by inadequate resourcing of schools and communities. Lupton's research into distinctive features of schools in disadvantaged areas highlighted the impact of material poverty in the home on the work of schools. The schools she studied sought to actively reduce the impact of poverty in the home by '... making sure that poverty did not interfere with the core curriculum ... none of the schools expected financial contributions from parents and pupils for equipment and materials' (2004: 9). Furthermore, 'discrepancy' between resources held by schools serving different SES communities privileges the more affluent (Kervow and Bernhardt, 1993:136). Daly and Leonard posit that education is not cost free as it requires '... spending on books, lunches, transport, uniform, runners, school-bag as well as out-of school activities such as school trips' (2002:130). If education is to claim its transformational potential it must support the key workers within the educational system. Teachers working within poverty stricken contexts deserve support to understand and reflect on that context and to develop skills specific to their needs. Within the Irish context, Conaty highlights the paramount importance of the 'raising of poverty issues within schools and supporting the development of appropriate preventative methodologies, strategies, and practices' (2002:193). Olsen and Fuller also problematise the need for teachers to reflect on their working contexts, and posit that, 'unless educators have had exposure to poverty and an understanding of the dynamics of poverty, they will subconsciously take middle-class expectations of parent-school relationships into their classrooms with them (2003:282).

Home material poverty impacted on the range of 'extra-curricular activities' the school could offer as schools needed to be sensitive to the restricted financial circumstances of families. Lupton found that 'enrichment activities had to be carefully chosen so that parents could afford to pay, and major trips had to be subsidised heavily and planned well in advance so parents had time to save' (2004:9). She also noted that homework was an issue since 'few pupils ... could be assumed to have learning resources like reference books and computers at home' (ibid:9).

Poverty has a predictable cyclical pattern. A high correlation exists between the risk of living in poverty, class origin, childhood economic circumstances, and levels of educational qualifications. According to Nolan and Whelan, there is a 'substantial

relationship between class origin and poverty' (1999:30). Furthermore, significant statistical class differences emerge in relation to 'the risk of falling below the poverty line [which] rises from 2 per cent for those from the professional and managerial origins ... to 20 percent to those with a manual background' (ibid:30).

For those who emerge from the educational system without qualifications the risk of living in poverty is one in five. In comparison, Leaving Certificate qualifications will reduce the risk to one in sixteen, and to one per cent for those with a third level qualification. According to the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) 'the likelihood of obtaining qualifications is associated with social background; those from disadvantaged backgrounds constitute the majority of those with no or low qualifications' (1995:ix).

A child living within a family experiencing poverty is disadvantaged within the society in which she/he is living. Firstly, the child's parents are placed under stresses not experienced by people who are economically secure. Parents may invest a lot of time and energy in simply surviving, in making whatever financial resources are available to them stretch to meet the demands of rent, food, clothing and heat. Simply stated, 'persons living in poverty do not possess the basic resources needed for survival' (Thornburg et al., 1991:203). In terms of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954), the family is surviving at the most basic physiological level and provision of food and shelter may occupy their energies, and demand a high percentage of their financial resources. According to Wescott Dodd and Konzal, in this situation 'the first priority for parents living below the poverty line will be finding the money to buy food and clothing' (2004:14).

Lynch is very clear that 'the lack of adequate income' prevents working class children from maximising the opportunities the education system offers and is a major factor in prevention of academic achievement:

The principal problem which working-class people have in relation to education is that they lack adequate income to maximise the advantages that the system could offer: looked at in another way, they are seriously deprived of resources relative to middle-class people with whom they must compete for credentials (1999:57).

In fact educational attainment is closely linked to economic status and the child living in a more economically secure household is highly likely to be living with adults who have achieved within the educational system, thus bolstering their chances of



educational attainment. According to Coleman ‘the resources devoted by the family to the child’s education interact with the resources provided by the school ...’ (1987:35), thus facilitating a greater overall impact for the child from a resource-rich background. The ability to access additional support for the young learner is also a resource-related factor. Middle or higher Social Economic Status (SES) parents have the resources to access additional support for their children if they consider it necessary. Furthermore, higher SES parents have the resources of selecting schools they believe will offer their children greater chances of attainment. This results in polarisation or ‘increasing differentiation of social class intake’ (Thrupp, 1999:7) and also in the ‘growing disparities in educational resources and educational quality’ (ibid, 1999:7) between schools. This ideology, *parentocracy*, in which a child’s education ‘is increasingly dependent upon the *wealth* and *wishes* of parents, rather than the *ability* and *effort* of pupils’ (Brown, 1997b:393), selects students on a social class and not a merit basis (ibida:745).

Fundamentally, capital poor parents do not have access to resources that would enable their children to participate equally in the educational system. It therefore behoves the educational system to recognise this and to address this injustice and imbalance, through adequate and creative resourcing and support.

#### **2.5.1.13 Social class and learning accessibility**

Examination of the relationship between social class and education in Ireland has shown that Ireland has a quite rigid class structure and that it is more difficult for the child of an unskilled manual worker to reach university than it is in a number of other European countries (Drudy and Lynch, 1993:27).

Social class position of itself does not cause educational failure. If, as a society, we value diversity then attainment within the educational system should not be class dependant. However, the resource and structural implications associated with class position contribute to the differentiation in educational outcome for people from different class groupings. Cregan found her Irish research confirmed international findings in that ‘variations in patterns of language use occurs according to social class’ (2007:175), and, significantly that middle class children’s language corresponded to the language required by the school system. Concerned with addressing the consequences Cregan warns that ‘children will continue to fail to achieve their potential while in school unless the existence of language variation is highlighted and its implications for success in school addressed’ (ibid:185).

Noguera differentiates between middle and working class parents in terms of ‘the power of choice’ (2001:198). He contends that:

By virtue of their human capital (education and information) and economic capital, middle-class parents can leave a school if they do not like the way their children are being treated or if they perceive the quality of education as inadequate (ibid:198).

According to Lareau, it is not strictly the presence of resources but the activation of resources through social practices that convert resources into profits (2000:145). But of course you need the resources in order to activate them.

Olsen and Fuller explore the relationship between class and school achievement and in so doing acknowledge how the experiences and opportunities of middle class children, specifically the social and language behaviours, dovetail with school expectations. They posit that ‘students from middle class families generally acquire these behaviours prior to entering school, while students with limited resources may not have had these advantages and, consequently, enter schools that were designed for someone else’ (2003:281). Disturbingly, Nolan and Whelan acknowledge the close relationship between class and life chances, stating that, ‘life-chances are significantly related to class...’ (1999:14).

The concept and definition of social class is not without debate. According to Drudy and Lynch ‘occupation is normally used as the best, albeit somewhat inadequate, single indicator of class position’ (1993:138). They acknowledge the shortfalls of this classification, citing other factors which might be taken into account when categorising class position. These include ‘relations to property, ability to command resources, educational background, income, wealth and ‘life chances’ – i.e. access to factors such as good health, housing and educational opportunities for one’s children’ (ibid:138).

I propose to leave the debate regarding definition of social class aside and to simply acknowledge the existence of class groupings within society. I will instead focus on the persistence of factors associated with class groupings. Devine, drawing on Goldthorpe’s work (1980), defines the advantages appertaining to class positions (2004:5). There are three broad areas, firstly there are ‘economic resources, including wealth, income, and other forms of capital such as business enterprise and professional practices’ (ibid:5). Secondly there are ‘cultural resources .... importance

attached to life long education '(ibid:5). Thirdly and finally there are 'social resources in the sense of involvement in social networks' (ibid:5). This categorization strongly resonates with Bourdieu's capital framework. My review of the literature confirms that the middle class enjoy specific advantages associated with wealth, cultural resources, and social networks. As already discussed, parentocracy, is one manifestation of social-class resource and power differentiation. In practical terms this means that learning opportunities are more accessible to those who occupy the middle and upper social class strata of society.

Lareau's research analysed the impact of social class on parental involvement in education. Her work, a comparative study of the culture of working class and upper middle class homes, is strongly influenced by Bourdieu's capital framework. Analysis of processes associated with these homes offers an insight into factors that contribute to *the accessibility of learning*. Lareau compared the 'separation between the family life and educational institutions' of the working class home with the 'interconnectedness between the family life and educational institutions' of the middle class homes (2000:169). This separateness or interconnectedness was manifested through the actions parents took in relation to their children's education. Working class parents 'viewed education as something that took place in school, under the supervision of the teacher', and therefore 'trusted the school to educate their children' (ibid:169). In comparison, upper middle class parents 'actively supervised, supplemented, and intervened in their children's schooling' (ibid:169).

The consequences of discontinuity between the working class culture of the home and the middle class culture of the school has already been discussed. Wescott Dodd and Konzal contend that when a young learner enters school not only may the child move into a world which does not contain symbols of his/her own world but this further compounded by the lack of understanding between adults within the two worlds of home and school, each of whom may be unable to read the cultural signals of the other. This can cause difficulties in communication between worlds, the result of which can be the internalisation of negative messages by the young learner. Wescott Dodd and Konzal contend that 'many times parents who are poor or whose cultures are different from teachers' demonstrate their care for their children in ways that are unfamiliar to the teachers' (2002:152).

A number of educationalists including Halsey et al. acknowledge the different types of learning that takes place and attribute the lack of attainment to the social forces which work in favour of learners from middle class backgrounds. They state that 'both within and outside the formal educational system, there are social forces which weigh systematically against working-class children in respect of those types of learning which make for educational success...' (1997:32)

According to Lareau a deep social class divide exists in relation to how parents understand and operationalise their role in relation to supporting their children within the formal educational system. While parents in both communities she studied shared the desire for their children to succeed, their behaviour in relation to the school differed greatly:

Upper-middle-class parents, particularly when their children were floundering academically, worked to customize their children's school experience. They tried to tailor programmes and activities to meet their children's needs. There were signs that parents' interventions (or lack of interventions) influenced children's classroom performance, and that the mothers' experiences at school (as well as their friendships with other parents in the community) shaped parents' actions at home (2000:170).

Lareau addressed another manifestation of social class difference when she explored children's leisure time activities. Her work uncovered very different patterns of social interaction outside of school hours. She depicted very different lifestyles for children from different backgrounds, with working class children spending time within kin groups and the more advantaged children attending programmed activities. Lareau noted that 'parents would often stay to watch these activities providing an opportunity to interact with other school parents' (Dornbusch and Glasgow, 1996:41). Lareau problematised the development of social networks created around middle class children and their in school and out-of-school activities. The social networks of working class parents on the other hand were 'limited to relatives in the area' (ibid:41) and were not organised around parents of other children attending the school. Middle class networks provided direct access to information about teachers, and wider school issues.

There are a number of issues at play here. The lifestyles of middle class children and the social networks closely aligned to school do not necessarily represent a more desirable lifestyle from my point of view. However, it is important to acknowledge that this type of networking can enhance the opportunities for communication and sharing of information relating to school and school matters. It would be audacious of

me to represent middle class culture as superior to working class culture and that is not my intention, nor indeed my conviction. Lynch strongly defends working class culture, and declares that working class children are alienated from the system by 'the absence of the financial resources to make the system work for themselves' (1999:58).

In more recent studies researchers are moving away from a deficit model of working class culture towards a more appreciative and in-depth understanding. Studies have focused on 'the strengths of parents and communities with various racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics' (Epstein, 2001:59). There seems to be a move away from the cultural arrogance of the 80s and 90s, to a greater understanding of working class culture. As de Carvalho notes:

The cultural mismatch view and the knowledge about cultural diversity have moved educational interventions away from the cultural deprivation disabling approach to the direction of learning about and valuing the skills, strengths, and values of ethnic minority children and their families (2001:15).

#### **2.5.1.14 Home-school dynamic**

According to Haynes and Ben-Avie parental involvement in schools positively effect teachers, parents, and school practices, as well as community dynamics (1996:45). They contend that when parents become more involved in the school it increases the staff's knowledge base of the 'socio cultural context of the communities served by the school' (ibid:45). As the teacher gains knowledge of the context of children's lives he/she is in a position to reduce the discontinuity between home and school contexts. This in turn informs practice and enables the teacher to adapt her/his pedagogical approaches to fit the child's needs more effectively. Secondly, there are immediate practical parent outcomes. According to Haynes and Ben-Avie parents may 'learn ways to help their children' and indeed 'become more motivated to further their own education' (ibid:45). They also identify the enhanced capacity of the school to sustain educational change through maintaining the commitment and involvement of parents. In this situation the school transforms from a traditional site of the education of the young to a 'potent force in the community' (ibid:46).

Thus far school-home collaboration has been presented as a formula with which to address low educational achievement and educational disadvantage. Development of transferable skills across contexts and parental involvement in school have been

mooted as tools to address discontinuity which has been identified as a keystone of educational disadvantage. However, not all educationalists promote a seamless transmission and transition of values, functions and culture across contexts. Stigler challenges the philosophical foundations which promote unity of culture between the world of school and home. Influenced by Lambert's work on bilingualism, Stigler proposes that individual-institution relationships can be either additive or subtractive. In an additive relationship, the development of the institution 'supplements and extends the power of individuals rather than taking away from individual power' (1991:199). He proposes that the Japanese have an additive education model, with clear boundaries between the function of the home and school:

Schools have their own goals and ways of working, and they do not need to reflect the particular characteristics of their clientele. Homes, on the other hand, serve functions distinct from schools and do not tend to be concerned with academic objectives (ibid:202).

The role of the school in this additive model is to 'teach academic skills and knowledge, and the values and attitudes that support the acquisition of knowledge' (Stigler, 1991:202). The home and school perform different functions. The Japanese mother does not teach her child academic skills but acts as a 'commiserator'. In this model 'the school is a tough, demanding place and there is no time in the Japanese school to attend to the child's emotional well-being' (ibid:203).

On the other hand the subtractive conception of individual-institutional relationships is epitomised by 'a struggle between individuals and institutions such that functions taken over by institutions are necessarily *taken away from* individuals' (Stigler, 1991:199). Stigler believes this subtractive model underlies the US educational system, and contends that teachers and parents have identified the goal of teaching as 'the development of children's self-esteem and general emotional being' (ibid:201), a function that was in the past ascribed to the family. The role of the home is related to the expectations of the school in that, 'the home is expected to socialize children for academic achievement and to duplicate and support functions of the school in some fundamental ways' (ibid:201). In sharp contrast to the additive model, responsibility for academic performance is shared between home and school. When academic failure occurs in the additive model, blame is firmly located in the school. However, when failure occurs in the subtractive model 'there is some doubt as to where the blame should be assigned' (ibid: 201).

de Carvalho challenges collaborative theorists who promote modification of home practices without addressing alternative models to enhance learning. She proposes that:

In effect homework policies have redefined '*the home as an extension of the classroom*' and homework 'as an assignment to be completed out of school hours *preferably at home,*' thus avoiding extended school hours or community alternatives (2001:18).

Her work is critical of the assumptions made by school authorities and policy makers of their right to invade the home through expectations of support for homework:

... the intrusion into the educative practices of families (by requiring specific forms of academic support and assigning more homework) represents an attempt at making the home curricula uniform, at a time when diversity is celebrated in the school curriculum (ibid:20).

de Carvalho contends that educational policy to involve parents at 'best hypothesis ... extends compensatory education to the family realm' (ibid:24), and at 'worst hypothesis, by regulating the educational contribution of families, it homogenises family culture, and legitimises parental evaluation by the school' (ibid:24). She challenges the current, and I imagine, broadly accepted beliefs that parents have a responsibility to co-operate with schools to support children's academic learning. Furthermore, she contends that there is a middle class bias inherent in interventions which seek increased parental involvement in the school system:

These formulations tend to automatically benefit those families who are already cognizant of academic culture and *naturally* perform the role expected by school, while creating automatic disadvantage for families unfamiliar with school culture and unfit (by their very life conditions) to meet its expectations (ibid:46).

Powell highlights a number of concerns relating to the power dimension between schools and home. He asks the question whether or not it is 'appropriate for schools to encroach on the family's authority via programmes that have the potential of professional intrusion into the private sphere of family life?' (1991:310). Henry's analysis of parental reticence to participate in educational interventions echoes de Carvalho's criticism of the school system for its ever increasing demands on parents who 'may be wary of school demands for their inclusion. To some it feels as though the *blame* for the perceived failure of the educational system is being switched to parents' (Henry, 1996:46).

Enhanced parental involvement in their children's education has been presented as a framework to address educational disadvantage. However, interventions which rely heavily on parental support and practices within the home have been noted to favour the already privileged middle classes. de Carvalho's and Henry's criticisms of school expectations on parents are not without merit. Previous discussions on poverty and class are pertinent to this debate. How can parents with diminished resources, including time, money, and capital, and also perhaps negative school experiences as both adults and children, be expected to compensate for an educational system that is not positively discriminating in favour of marginalised children?

In consideration of this dilemma, it is my contention that relationships based on mutual respect, cultural understanding, and a negotiated understanding of the child's learning needs must inform practice, not only on a daily basis in relation to issues such as homework but on a larger scale such as the development of intervention projects.

#### **2.5.1.15 Home summary**

In this section I have endeavoured to focus on the home environment of the child and to acknowledge that the child grows and learns within the home context prior to attending formal schooling and also during formal schooling. I have endeavoured to describe home based factors which affect the child's capacity to learn, all the time conscious that the interplay between the context of the home and school and community is central to understanding the effects of the home environment. I have looked at the effects of parental attitudes and attainment and acknowledged the key role of parents and family in supporting the child's learning, all the time conscious of the need to go beyond a simple analysis of home environmental factors such as parental educational attainment and family income to a more complex understanding of how parents can support their children to achieve. I have examined contextual factors such as poverty, social class, and social networks, conscious of how working class communities experience alienation from the prevailing societal norms.

This section concluded with an examination of parental involvement in school practices. And, while acknowledging the potential positive outcomes of working in partnership I have also interrogated school practices which may put already stressed



families under pressure and project blame for school failure into the family arena without examining other potential solutions to educational disadvantage.

### **2.5.2 School context**

Schools are an integral part of the socio-economic-cultural landscape of industrial societies. Dewey centrally locates the role of the educational system in social life stating that ‘what nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life’ (1916:9). According to the OECD publication, *‘Our Children at Risk’*, ‘...schools of a kind existed from early history’ (1995:80). Elkind contends that ‘the school is a mirror of society and of the family. As society and the family change, so too must the school’ (1995:8). According to Tormey and Haran ‘education and schooling are not separate from the world: they happen in the world’ (2003:32).

Dewey conceptualises the school as an institution with ‘its timetables, schemes of classification, of examination and promotion, of rules of order’ (1938: 18). Coleman describes the school as ‘a constructed institution’, and the family as a ‘nonconstructed, spontaneous institution’ (1987:35). While there may be some uniformity across schools in terms of allocation of staffing and curriculum, each school is a unique entity sculpted by among other factors, human characteristics, ethos, culture, and location. Schools differ in terms of intake of pupils and academic outcomes. In her research into academic and personal development in Secondary students in Ireland Smyth, concluded that, ‘social class inequalities persist in academic achievement, absenteeism rates, and dropout rates. Furthermore, the social class context of the school has an additional effect on pupil outcomes, over and above a pupil’s individual background’ (1999:216).

In order to locate the school context I will briefly describe the historical context in which the school system evolved, and posit a number of different theories as to the role of the school as an institution in society. I will then explore factors within this site which affect the accessibility of learning for the individual.

The advent of compulsory education had a ‘marked effect on the relationship between family and society’ (OECD, 1997:25). Traditionally, children’s education had been the shared responsibility of the home, the community, and the church, but as

knowledge grew and became more specialised teachers came to be seen as ‘the experts when it came to academic education’ (ibid:25). According to Epstein:

Increasingly, the school began to distance itself from the home by emphasizing the teachers’ special knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy. Teachers began to teach subjects that were not familiar to parents, using methods and approaches that were not part of parents’ experiences (2001:24).

In this study school is conceptualised as a dynamic organism housed in a physical building with a school community that is made up of a host of stakeholders. These include children, families, staff, service providers, community personnel, funders, and policy makers. How these stakeholders communicate, co-operate, and maximise their combined potential all contributes to more and less effective school outcomes. Indeed I subscribe to the notion that ‘schools are not primarily buildings but organisations and networks of relations and communications’ (OECD, 1998:10).

These ‘networks of relations and communications’ are the living mechanisms that enable learning to take place. They include the internal and external relationships all of which are susceptible to change. In exploring the accessibility of learning this thesis is ultimately exploring the factors affecting how relationships and resources are managed within and between sites to optimise learning.

In Ireland children are legally obliged to attend school until the age of 16 or until they have sat their Junior Certificate state examinations<sup>2</sup>. Children generally start school at four though they are not legally obliged to do so until the age of six. Children usually remain within the primary school sector for eight years and then transfer to the second level sector. Second level schools operate a five or six-year cycle depending on whether a transition year option is offered after Junior Certificate at the end of third year.

### **2.5.2.1 Role of the school**

Defining the role of the school might seem like a straight forward task. Do we educate children to reach their human potential or to ‘meet national, economic and technical needs?’ (Greene, 1995:9). The Department of Education and Science define the objective of the education system as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> Secondary school students sit two state examinations, the Junior Certificate at the end of three years and the Leaving Certificate at the end of their final year in Secondary school.

The objective of the education system is to provide a broadly based, inclusive, high quality education that will enable individuals to develop their full potential and to live fulfilled lives, as well as contributing to Ireland's social and economic development (2005:15).

The role of the school may be conceptualised at an individual, family, and societal level. At an individual level, schools are 'faced with the challenge of preparing children to live in a future we cannot predict with any certainty but one: Change will be a constant' (Westcott Dodd and Konzal, 2002:3). Drudy and Lynch see the role of the school in terms of the '... socialisation of the young and transmission of culture' (1993:26). At family level Powell, advances the role of the school in terms of 'strengthening the family's child-rearing competence' (1991:308). At a societal level, Drudy and Lynch see the school as a powerful force that plays a significant part in social mobility and control through the selection of individuals 'for different types of occupation through its assessment and certification. In this way it not only allocates people to different positions within the economic system but also controls the level of social mobility' (1993:26).

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) publication, '*Poverty and Educational Disadvantage*', acknowledges the transformational potential which the school holds to contribute to a more equal and just society stating that '... education holds within it the potential to make a significant contribution towards the transformation of society...' (1994:iv). Kellaghan et al. suggest that the school has a political brief if 'equality of participation or achievement is to be attained' (1995:2). They contend that the school must not be regarded as 'a passive institution but as one that bears responsibility for providing adequate resources for creating achievement' (ibid:2). Lodge et al. also locate the role of the school within a wider societal context. They investigate the role of the school within the context of an Irish society which is experiencing rapid social change:

There is a need to bring to the fore the realities of living and learning in an increasingly diverse Ireland and the role of primary schooling (as a key aspect of the educational system where all young people are required to attend) in shaping and contributing to such change (2004:6).

The school holds the power, in part at least, to maintain the status quo or to transform the individual and, by association, society. Daly and Leonard recognise the potential transformational role of the school stating that it may ‘assist young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to find appropriate jobs and worthwhile careers’ (2002:130).

Sylva embraces the school’s transformative potential when she proposes a preventative role for the school. She believes that schools have the capacity to prevent educational disadvantage by developing appropriate skills and attitudes in children and by facilitating them to ‘develop the skills and attitudes which propel them to their eventual life destinations’ (2000:121).

#### **2.5.2.2 A matter of perspective: Seeing big or seeing small**

Schools have the potential to make a profound and lasting difference to the lives of the children in their care, both directly in their work with the children and indirectly by supporting the families to support their children. Indeed the minister of Education and Science recognises shortcomings of our educational system stating that ‘we know too many of our people do not reach their full potential in our education system and, as a result, cannot benefit from full participation in our society and economy’ (Department of Education and Science, 2005:3). Fundamentally ‘education is never neutral. Through educating people we help to make them what they are’ (Tormey and Haran, 2003:33). But where can the energy to make a strategic difference, to reflect, to advocate, and to change come from? One possible option is in how we see the world, and by implication how we see our roles as educators. Greene, inspired by the work of Mann, adopted a ‘perspectives framework’ namely, the choice we all have to see big or to see small. In seeing small we distance ourselves from people, ‘we choose to see from a detached viewpoint, to watch behaviors from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday live’ (Greene, 1995:10). In seeing big, we are up close and personal. We choose to resist ‘viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead’ (ibid: 10). In seeing big we see life from the other’s point of view and understand them within the context of their life circumstances.

Greene applies this perspective framework to schooling and considers the consequences of seeing big or small. In seeing small, school is viewed ‘through the lens of a system ... is preoccupied with test scores, ‘time on task’, management procedures, ethnic and racial percentages, and accountability measures’ (1995:11). In seeing big, we come into ‘close contact with details and with particularities that cannot be reduced to statistics or even to the measurable’ (ibid:10). We see the kaleidoscope of life in all its richness, messiness, joy and colour. The courage to see big resonates strongly with literature on hope in Chapter Six, ‘Journey of Hope, Transference, Transformation and Transition’. Seeing big brings the teacher close to the people she/he works with and creates the context in which empathy and creativity can flourish. This echoes Freire’s vision that ‘our relationships with the learners demands that we respect them and demands equally that we be aware of the concrete conditions of their world, the conditions that shape them’ (2005:102).

Schools make political decisions in how they operate. They can be proactive, thereby seeking collaborative solutions to problems and challenges. Conversely, they may operate as reactive institutions, battening down the hatches as the troubles of society enter on a daily basis. The decision to be either proactive or reactive is closely related to the ethos, culture and belief system, which is manifested through the interaction of school staff with each other, the children, and with the community. The way in which schools function is also mediated through the resources available to it. This thesis seeks to establish the role the school plays in making learning accessible, and by so doing will seek to uncover the ‘organisation and network of relations and communications’ which enable this to be achieved.

I will now discuss specific school based factors which affect accessibility of learning and illustrate clearly the influence of school ethos and culture on learning outcomes.

### **2.5.2.3 Ethos and culture**

The first task of the school as a learning community is to strengthen collaborative links between teachers and parents. This work must be done both by the school leaders, acting to shape school climate or ethos, and by every classroom teacher (Coleman, 1998:150).

When you walk through the gateway of a school, up the pathway and in the front door you are receiving messages about the ethos and culture of that school. Every school is different, and difference may be based on easily identifiable factors such as location, size, and age. However, the less immediately obvious factors such as school ethos,

culture, and value systems are equally pertinent in determining the character of any school. Indeed school cultures may be ‘vibrant, adaptive, and thriving or toxic and dying’ (Elbot and Fulton, 2008:2).

Visible clues offer an insight into the ethos and culture of the school. The entrance halls and corridors may have religious icons, examples of children’s work, a merit board, posters advertising parent classes, a sign excluding parents from using the main entrance, or a welcoming sign giving directions to the Principal’s office. As you walk through the building, information about the ethos and culture of school is very much in evidence. Who do you meet? As children move between classes do they seem happy, do the adults with them make eye contact with you and greet you? Is it immediately obvious how approachable the Principal is? Is the school secretary an effective gatekeeper, filtering requests to the relevant personnel? Has decision-making power been delegated effectively so that the Principal does not have to deal with every request? Do you meet parents visiting the school, are they confident in locating the class? Are there agreed procedures for meeting class teachers? All of this soft information may reveal itself in a short walk from the front door to the Principal’s office. I believe that each school, like each family, has its own identity, its own unique atmosphere created by a combination of the style of leadership, the physical building, the people who work and learn there, and the ethos and belief system in operation.

How do the prevailing culture and ethos relate to learning accessibility? Sergiovanni advocates pedagogical leadership and conceptualises the school as a living community. Within this community there is a commitment to academic success, and expectation that children will do well, the curriculum is focused, achievement standards are both explicit and focused and students are encouraged to do their best (Sergiovanni, 1998:39). Teachers, and in particular the Principal of the school, understand the role of the school as one in which academic achievement is fostered in a caring supportive community. The community nurtures and develops teachers and children. This school has a culture of collaboration in which, ‘leaders and followers reflect together, learn together and inquire together as they care together to construct a reality that helps them to navigate through a complex world’ (ibid:41). Elbot and Fulton urge schools to build an intentional school culture ‘based on shared values,

beliefs and behaviors’, so that they may build ‘excellence for students, families, and for the community’ (2008:2).

#### **2.5.2.4 School as community**

As stated earlier Sergiovanni conceptualises the school as a living, dynamic community. To understand community it is necessary to interpret the quality of relationships, the nature of expectations, and the styles of leadership. As seen above Sergiovanni advocates pedagogical leadership which develops social and intellectual capital to nurture the growth and development of all stakeholders. He rejects traditional ways of thinking about ‘connections’ understood as ‘social contracts’, and traditional ways of understanding human nature, conceptualised as ‘constrained’. He builds a rationale for schools as communities in which connections are understood as ‘social covenants’ and human nature is perceived as ‘unconstrained’ (1998:43). According to Sergiovanni, Rousseau Elementary School embraces the ideology of pedagogical leadership with the attendant understandings of ‘connections’ and ‘human nature’ (ibid:44). In this school teachers and students hold high expectations of each other, students are given ‘considerable latitude in deciding important things’, and are actively involved in ‘how learning goals will be achieved’ (ibid:44). This philosophy reflects the literature on resilience which builds the personal and interpersonal skills of the students, and is discussed in Chapter Six ‘Journey of Hope: Transference, Transition and Transformation’.

Section 2.5.3 explores the community as a site which impacts on the accessibility of learning. The Gemeninschaft model which informs the discussion on community greatly values relationships and mirrors Sergiovanni’s model of a school inspired by pedagogical leadership.

#### **2.5.2.5. Teacher attributes**

Teachers are the keystone of the educational system. Freire speaks of the dignity of teaching, (2005:62). Greene associates a vocational dimension with the profession of teaching stating that:

We who are teachers would have to accommodate ourselves to lives as clerks or functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we share (1995:1).

While teachers traditionally come from middle class backgrounds, are predominantly female and tend to work within the educational system to retirement, we actually know very little about them as a working community. According to Drudy and Lynch, ‘there have been remarkably few studies of the social background of teachers’ (1993:93). Gregory argues that it is imperative for teachers to be informed of the child’s cultural home practices so that this can be used as a starting point for their learning journey within formal schooling. Implicit in her argument is a respect for prior and continuing learning outside of the formal system and an acknowledgement that one must inform the other. She posits that ‘... if real equality is to be promoted, we surely need to know which cultural practices young children know about both before and outside school (2000:116). Henry associates teacher’s level of understanding with their effectiveness in communicating with parents:

Teachers and administrators who have a better understanding of family cultures and an awareness of how parents are distanced from schools will be able, I believe, to interact more thoughtfully with parents (1996:103).

Teachers work in diverse contexts. Educationalists (Epstein, Barbour et al., Conaty, Wescott and Dodd) advise them to get to know the contexts and families with which they work to enable them to effectively create relevant learning opportunities for children. According to Wescott Dodd and Konzol ‘the more educators know about children’s families, the more effectively they will be able to teach them at school’ (2002:27). Higgins advocates a reassessment of the role of the teacher to include a review of how the teacher works within the classroom as well as how he/she relates to the home and community:

I would like to see the teacher as a resource person, an enabler, a facilitator of learning ... A teacher needs to know the community in which he or she is operating, needs to be aware of how unemployment affects people, of how illness in the family affects the child, of how family strife might affect the child (1999:42).

Teachers need to have an understanding of the strengths, culture, and expectations of parents and indeed of children. This has been discussed already in relation to parental aspirations, which were found to be common across class contexts and only differed in relation to the resources necessary to enact them. Cognisant of how cultural differences between teachers and the home can give rise to miscommunication, Barbour et al. charge teachers with the responsibility to develop the skills to navigate and communicate effectively across cultures (1997:319). Finally, Florio-Ruane highlights how ‘differences in language, race, ethnicity, and social class are seen as



explanatory of school failure and, as such, are problems rather than resources' (Florio-Ruane, 2001:38).

Research indicates that teacher attitudes to low-income parents may impact negatively on children's attainment. Barbour et al. contend that teachers who transmit a message of low expectations to parents cause them to be disempowered and discouraged through the lack of high expectations and engagement. They found that when teachers:

didn't expect low income parents to be productive participants in their children's education, and, in turn, that those parents felt that their participation wouldn't have much effect and therefore often had negative attitudes towards the schools (Heleen 1990) (1997:6).

Barbour et al. contend that children are very perceptive and will 'internalise these attitudes of mutual disrespect' (1997:6) with a resultant negative impact on their own attitudes and motivation. They ascertain that:

children acquire certain attitudes by hearing words, observing actions, and surmising the feelings of significant others in their environment. These attitudes then become more firm when children are encouraged to express such beliefs. Adult attitudes result from perceptions sustained over years (ibid 1997:4).

Davies attests to the prevalence of negative teacher attitudes to low-income families and acknowledges the deficit view of teachers who 'locate as the primary cause of the failure in schools of so many children from poor families the characteristics of those families and communities' (1993a:44). This is accompanied by a 'lack of confidence by educators in the interests of low-income families in their children's education and their ability to help' (ibid:44) with education. Vincent in her study of parent and teacher power relations concludes that 'fractured and fragmented' school communities were manifested through 'a division between professional teachers and lay parents'. This situation was 'maintained by teachers' adherence to the ideal of the 'good parent' – a non-negotiated view of 'appropriate' parental behaviour imposed upon an unsuspecting parent body' (1996:112). Valdes problematises the relationships between parents and schools, stating that these relationships 'reflect the structural locations of individuals in the wider society' (1996:39). Furthermore he contends that 'simply bringing parents to schools will not change the racist or classist responses that teachers may have towards them and their behaviours' (ibid:39).

Negative relationships and poor communication between teachers and parents create negative consequences for children. McCaleb decries the destructive impact on the

child when both his/her teachers, understood as his/her parents and the teachers, are at odds (1994:32).

Sleeter too is exercised about the difference between the background of teachers and students. She contends that the difference in cultural/class origins is not insurmountable but must be given due consideration and teachers must be supported to navigate between cultures:

The fact that demographic profiles of teachers and children in U.S. schools are increasingly at variance does not mean that teachers cannot be expected to learn to relate to the children and their families. It does, however, mean that we cannot simply expect this to happen 'naturally' (1996:x).

#### **2.5.2.6 Parent- teacher partnerships: Benefits and barriers**

The way in which individual teachers perceive their roles can differ significantly between teachers and indeed between schools. Much of the literature advocates building partnerships between home and school contexts as a means to developing shared understanding, increasing accessibility, and improving student outcome. There is no doubt that teachers are in a position to develop partnerships. However, to embrace the development of partnership teachers need to be supported through professional development within an intentional school culture.

Dornbusch and Glasgow surveyed 252 teachers in five diverse San Francisco Bay area second level schools to discover 'their opinions and judgements about a number of topics relating to teacher – parent relations' (1996:37). They found that teachers did not want any unsolicited contact from parents and were only happy if they had initiated the contact for a specific purpose, for example, dealing with a problem.

Epstein, who views parents as an 'available and untapped and undirected resource that teachers can mobilise to help more children master and maintain needed skills for school' (1991:274), acknowledges with some frustration the reticence of teachers to engage in a collaborative process with parents, stating that 'most teachers and administrators are not prepared to understand – much less design, implement, and evaluate – productive connections with the families of their students' (2001:6).

Mc Allister Swap interrogates the role of the teacher in relation to working with parents. She tells us that, 'teachers often feel that parent outreach is an added burden' (1993:65). McCaleb profiles a set of skills teachers need to develop in order to meet 'the challenge of educating all their students' (1994: xii). The role of the teacher as

educator, communicator, and enabler co-exist. According to Mc Caleb, teachers need to:

1. Learn to develop their classrooms as communities of learners in which each student is valued;
2. Learn how to affirm each student's cultural and linguistic identity by using the knowledge each brings to school as the primary "text" for developing literacy;
3. Learn how to achieve collaborative relationships in a way that respects the student's family and community as valuable contributors to the educational process;
4. Learn to view themselves, in their role as teachers, as authentic human beings-not all knowing authorities but co-investigators in a learning community (1994: xii).

However, not all teachers are comfortable or confident with a multiplicity of roles. Wolfendale acknowledges that 'teachers are undeniably key facilitators, but we cannot take for granted equal competence in the sensitive area of human interaction among all teachers' (1992:128). However difficult to achieve, Coleman encourages teachers to 'take responsibility for strengthening parent efficacy' (1998:61), and conjectures that in so doing they will improve 'the attitude of children in the classroom', thereby reaping immediate benefits. Some teachers may be confident in their work with children but find difficulty working with parents. Draper and Duffy, note the different skills demanded of teachers and observe that 'often practitioners who feel confident in their work with children feel less confident in their work with parents' (1992:150).

Others teachers question the boundaries between home and school responsibilities, with a growing number of schools performing health and social care functions. Henry advises that 'tensions have arisen around the issue of educators as social workers' (1996:45).

Research indicates that there is at least reluctance on the part of teachers to move beyond the basic role of implementing the curriculum, to reaching out beyond the classroom into the families and communities of the children they are teaching. There is strong research evidence supporting the development of partnerships and collaborative actions between teachers and other key stakeholders. If the teacher's role includes reaching out beyond the classroom to develop collaborative practices with key stakeholders then school policies and school leadership must play a significant role in guiding and supporting individual teachers. The INTO are unequivocal in their belief that the school must:

... ensure that parents have the opportunity to learn about and become familiar with how and what their children learn in class, They need to know that their active participation is both welcome and needed and that it can make a significant contribution to their children's welfare (1994:99).

According to Wescott Dodd and Konzal the effectiveness of parent teacher collaboration rests on respectful relationships. They state that 'schools can support what parents do at home only when they have a deep understanding of and respect for what parents believe and value' (2002:242). Once schools embrace the value of partnership, they are then in the most powerful position to generate collaborative respectful actions between teachers and parents. The school can act as a pro-active gatekeeper and open the gates literally and metaphorically to families and communities. Eccles and Harold acknowledge teachers as the key players with the opportunity to 'either facilitate or inhibit parental involvement by their own beliefs and attitudes about parental involvement' (1996:11). In contrast, if parents want to generate collaborative actions they may be successful with regard to their own children but are powerless to influence the ethos and belief systems and practices of the school. So the balance of power firmly resides in the school, as Coleman notes that 'in general, educators hold decisive power in interactions with parents and students' (1998: 1). Finally, according to Comer and Haynes successful parental involvement initiatives must be embedded within respectful collaborative school practice and ethos (1991:271).

Barbour et al. acknowledge the importance of communication between parents and teachers and firmly place the responsibility for nurturing that communication in the hands of the school, recognising yet again that the school and the teachers hold the balance of power:

If children are to benefit, teachers must provide the impetus to break down communication barriers resulting from different cultural expectations and habits of interacting ... it is the school's responsibility to lead, and teachers need to be prepared to go more than halfway in reaching out to parents (Barbour et al., 1997:293).

Coleman's work dissects the part each member of the triad, that is parents, teachers and students, play in the development of collaborative practices. He notes the key role of teacher attitudes in the development of partnership:

Teacher attitudes and practices can have a substantial impact upon the perception of collaboration – the sense of partnership that can be generated amongst parents and the sense of teacher/student collaboration that can be generated among students (1998:97).

Coleman returns to this theme in the closing chapters of his book when, on foot of his research findings, he challenges myths about parents and students which persist among educators. It is worth giving a brief summary of the myths outlined by Coleman as it offers insight into how parents can be perceived by individual teachers and school authorities, thus illuminating one of the barriers that exist to parental teacher collaboration:

Myth 1: Some parents (and their children) don't care about school and schooling;  
Myth 2: Some parents cannot help their children to be successful in school;  
Myth 3: Parents are involved and influential in schools at present;  
Myth 4: Parental involvement is a way for parents to control schools  
(1998: 143-148).

Coleman counteracts these myths, and argues that there are detrimental implications for the educational attainment of young people and the possibility of building collaborative partnerships with parents when such beliefs prevail.

The way in which teachers conceptualise their role and how they act are integral to school improvement and consequently to attainment. Coleman connects school improvement with how teachers conceptualise their role:

...it is unlikely that schools anywhere can be improved without the presence of substantial numbers of teachers who accept the view that the work of teaching has a dimension that goes beyond simple curricular activity (1998:115).

Cochran and Dean developed a teacher training programme as part of a process engineered to empower families and schools. Teachers learned how to 'empathise with parents and recognise their strength, make the most of parent-teacher conferences, and find creative ways to involve parents in school activities' (1991: 264). Furthermore, the programme built capacity within the school by giving special attention to 'helping classroom teachers appreciate their own strengths and work together in support of one another' (ibid:264). According to Cochran and Dean the outcomes for teachers were significant and increased their skill levels, improved their relationships with parents, and offered them the opportunity to review their belief systems in relation to parental involvement in education. The teachers involved in the programme showed:

an increase in skills in talking with distraught parents. Some teachers explained how the communication skills they learned helped them understand defensive behaviours, deal with frustrated parents, and understand what parents say (ibid:264).

de Carvalho highlights difficulties with the teacher's perception of the interest level of parents in their child's education. She explores how this impacts on the teacher's behaviour towards the child. Referring to the work of Lareau, de Carvalho quotes:

...when teachers believed that parents valued education and were heavily involved in children's schooling they took actions which they did not take for children whose parents were less active in schooling (2001:107).

According to de Carvalho the belief systems of teachers and their understanding of their roles, and in a broader sense on the role of the school within the context in which it is situated impacts on their actions. de Carvalho concludes:

... automatic and unconscious reading by the teacher of signs of cultural, social, and economic capital, orient decisions regarding the capitalization on the apparent *habitus* of the student (2000:107).

Wescott Dodd and Konzal offer an insight into how teachers as a body relate to parents, believing that teachers have specific expectations of parents and if parents do not meet those expectations there is a very great possibility of developing the myths that Coleman talks about:

when teachers think about parents, they see them as helpful when parents reinforce what they are trying to do at school. They don't want parents telling them how or what to teach. Teachers want parents to make sure their kids come to school, rested, fed, and with their homework done. The home and the school are separate but not equal, and what parents do with their children at home should complement rather than contradict what teachers do. It is easy to see how this model of the family-school connection disadvantages many children and their families (2002:31).

According to Epstein, teacher's attitudes to involve families, and consequently their practices, play a key role in forging that key relationship:

Teachers' practices to involve families are as or more important than family background variables such as race or ethnicity, social class, marital status, or mother's work status for determining whether and how parents become involved in their children's education (2001:45).

Kellaghan et al. present a very sound rationale determining the need for teachers to understand their pupils' backgrounds. Firstly, an informed teacher will be able to support the pupil to 'integrate their home and school experiences' thereby actively promoting learning (1995:3). Secondly, this knowledge will inform pedagogical practice. Wescott Dodd and Konzal argue that the benefits of involving parents in their children's education not only offers positive outcomes for children but has positive effects for the teachers also in that it will enable them 'to do their own work more effectively' (2002:7).

Some teachers actually fear parental involvement and partnership. The INTO publication '*Parental involvement, 'Possibilities for Partnership'*', acknowledges this fear and state that:

...fears remain that increasing parental involvement in schools particularly to the point of partnership and the involvement of parents in the classroom constitute a threat to professional status and even professional competence (1997: 17).

Powell, concerned with the nature of relationships between school and families, cites 'the desire on the part of schools to protect the autonomy of the school and its personnel' (1991:310) as one of the primary reasons for 'social distance between the schools and the families'(ibid:310). Casanova in turn challenges Epstein's naivety in relation to involving parents and raises the concern that 'a small minority of parents can seize power and dictate their preferences to the school as well as to other parents, potentially leading to anti-democratic consequences' (1996:30).

Barbour et al. offer yet another insight into the barriers that exist by drawing our attention to fears and vulnerabilities of teachers and how they may feel threatened by parents and criticism:

fear affects teachers as well as parents, and teachers may do little to encourage parental or community involvement. When teachers are uncertain or insecure about their own teaching skills, they fear criticism of how they do their job and discourage parent participation in their classrooms. When we have local criticism of schools, teachers become tired of being scapegoats for all the wrongs of society, and they often express a desire to be left alone to teach. When such attitudes permeate the school, parents are made to feel unwelcome in many different ways (1997:319).

The OECD report '*Parents as Partners in Schooling*' also acknowledges this vulnerability and prescribes the reasons why such should exist stating that, '... some teachers *are* vulnerable. The underlying but unspoken anxiety in many schools is that parents will use their new power to identify ineffective teachers' (1997:55). Comer also acknowledges the vulnerability of teachers and points to the lack of effective mechanisms to build trust between teachers and parents. He advises that:

when parent participation has not been well thought out and well-structured parents' concerns about teaching methods, the goals of the school, and even the competence of the staff can lead to conflict. For this reason, many educators shy away from parent participation programs (1986:444).

I hope I have established that teachers' personal attitudes and school culture are aspects of building effective practice. How individual teachers operate has a direct

impact not only on the children in their care but also on the relationships between the school and families. Epstein profiles the differences between teachers:

The main differences among teachers are their ability to put principles of child and adolescent development and organizational effectiveness into practice in their instruction and class room management, their ability to communicate with students as individuals, their belief about the importance of parents' involvement and parents' receptivity to guidance from school, and their ability to communicate with parents as partners in their children's education. These factors create more or less family-like schools (2001:36).

### **2.5.2.7 Leadership**

Leadership, according to Conaty is 'about demonstrating belief in people, providing support and challenging them' (2002:166). The leadership style of the Principal has a direct impact on how the school operates both in terms of academic pursuits and also in terms of supporting and challenging teachers to reflect on their practice. The role of the principle is multi-faceted. According to Lyons et al. 'the Principal may be involved in teaching, administration, mentoring staff, and communicating with parents ... and a host of organisations connected to the academic life and social care functions of the school' (2006:177). Sergiovanni defines a number of styles of leadership including, bureaucratic, visionary and entrepreneurial. However he advocates pedagogical leadership as it '... invests in capacity building by developing social and academic capital for students, and intellectual and professional capital for teachers' (1998:37).

Sergiovanni advocates the development of capital as a mechanism 'to improve levels of student learning and development' (1998:37); thus creating a direct link between leadership style and the promotion of learning accessibility and achievement. Segiovanni, conscious of the differentiation in capital between students emerging from different contexts, advances pedagogical leadership as a mechanism to address the lack of capital in other areas of the student's life:

For many students families are less stable and supportive. Neighbourhoods are in disarray. And traditional institutions such as the extended family, the YMCA, and YWCA, the church, and social club and community itself are not able to provide the support they once did. These students experience a society that is capital poor (ibid:38).

The Principal plays a key role in forging collaborative relationships between key stakeholders, including parents, teachers, students, and members of the broader community. The role of Principal is key to staff development and motivation, and to



raising expectations and awareness among staff on issues which include equality and partnership.

Epstein notes that when educational leaders are not prepared to support and challenge their staffs to work in a collaborative manner to involve parents proactively in their children's educational journey, the implications are magnified for those experiencing economic and educational disadvantage:

Most teachers and administrators are not prepared to guide and lead their staffs to develop strong school programmes and classroom practices that inform and involve all families about their children's learning, development, and educational plans for the future. The problem is serious for all educators, particularly for those who will teach in economically distressed or disadvantaged communities (Mac Iver and Epstein, 1990) (2001:6).

#### **2.5.2.8 School Summary**

This section examined school related factors which impede or contribute to learning. I explored the implications of how teachers conceptualise their roles, and indeed that of the school. In acknowledging the diverse backgrounds of teachers I advocated that teachers become aware of the cultural practices of the communities they work in. I have also advocated training and support for school staffs to enable them to work more effectively within diverse and indeed challenging communities.

In acknowledging the potential outcomes of working in partnership I have also acknowledged the fears teachers may have and noted the barriers which exist to developing collaborative practices. The final word on this section goes to Epstein who challenges schools to reflect on how they relate to children and the consequences and implications for their practices:

The way in which schools care about children is reflected in the way they care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as *students*, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of the children to the schools. If educators view students as *children*, they are likely to see both the family and community as partners with the school in children's education and development (2001:403).

#### **2.5.3 Community**

Community is the third and final ecological context to be analysed in terms of accessibility of learning. In common with the home and school contexts it too holds the potential to either support or impede learning accessibility. I begin by presenting a framework to interpret community and follow this with a brief analysis of community

from an historical perspective. The differences between communities, with the consequent implications for learning, are also acknowledged.

Schools and homes are located within community contexts. The nature of the community impacts both directly and indirectly on the individual. Gibbons problematises community in terms of its capacity to affect educational outcomes. He posits that community characteristics such as ‘ expectations, role models and skill transfers, alongside peer group effects that operate through interactions between children in the street and at school’ (2001:i) may all impact on the capacity of the community to support children’s learning. Indeed, the nature of community impacts directly through the quality of housing and infrastructure and also by the nature of experiences it provides to support the learner in the development and enhancement of academic, social, and personal skills. It impacts indirectly through its influence on the efficacy of school and home to support the student on his/her learning journey. Indeed ‘when economic, social and political crises arise, community problems always detract from school programmes and other educational objectives’ (Barbour et al., 1997:160).

There is growing recognition of how factors within the community and neighbourhood impact on learning (Kellaghan, Thornburg et al.). Thornburg et al. recognise that more and more ‘families are part of, and powerfully influenced by, larger wholes – the community with its various institutions, subgroups and cultures’ (1991:200). They highlight the link between the nature of community and the child’s growth and development:

Children’s developing attitudes, values, motivations, aspirations and, most important, their perceptions of their own self-worth are influenced by their experiences within these varying and often conflicting contexts of community (ibid:200).

Coleman’s research identified a strong correlation between high social capital in the community and low school drop out (1987:37). According to Le Compte and Dworkin ‘the conditions of life of individual children are profoundly affected and shaped by the social, economic, and political conditions obtaining in their neighbourhoods and communities’ (1991:84).

### **2.5.3.1 Decoding community**

The literature offers different interpretations of community. Firstly it identifies the school itself as a community comprising of teachers, learners, and auxiliary staff (Palmer). This section adopts Maden and Hillman's definition which recognises geographical, economic and social components of community in which community 'embodies the local geographical area which will often contain several social and cultural groups, and it also includes the local economy' (1996:333).

Tonnies model of *Gemeinschaft*/*Gesellschaft* offers a framework to interpret the nature of community (1955). *Gemeinschaft* represents 'the traditional folk relationships' (Merz and Furman, 1997:13). This community is one in which kinship and friendship are highly valued and people know each other very well. Tonnies, defines these relationships as both 'real and organic' (1955:37). According to Merz and Furman, 'commitments between people in *Gemeinschaft* are taken for granted, rather than intentionally chosen' (1997:13). Henry tells us that 'a *gemeinschaft* interpretation of education focuses on common feelings, traditions, and good will that bond people together in community' (1996:18). For Henry, this evokes Dewey's philosophy as Dewey was concerned with the nature of relationships within and beyond the school since, they are 'critical to teaching and learning. A school that is distancing and fragmented in its social relationships is unlikely to be an educative one' (Henry, 1996:18).

On the other hand *Gesellschaft* is organised 'to meet the demands of the market place' (Merz and Furman, 1997:14) and relationships are task based and strategically chosen 'to accomplish some end, or reciprocity, such as commercial trade' (ibid:14). Relationships have an 'imaginary and mechanical structure' (Tonnies, 1955:37).

### **2.5.3.2 Historical perspective: Changing communities, changing relationships**

Both the nature of communities and the pattern of relationships between community, homes, and schools, change over time. According to Merz and Furman, a strong relationship existed traditionally between an homogeneous local community and the school:

In its earliest forms, the public school was deeply connected to the traditional local community that it served. The local community was fairly homogeneous and stable, marked by close kinship ties and shared values (1997:36).

The relationship between the three sites of home, school, and community changed significantly with the advent of compulsory education, a time when the school assumed primary responsibility for the child's education. The school became more professionalised and bureaucratic, patterns of parenting changed, and community actors and events became isolated from schools. While the formal traditional relationships changed between sites, thus altering the existing dynamic, each site retained its individual capacity to impact on the student, and through the student to impact on the other sites. Not only did the relationships alter but the traditional functions carried out by each site also changed. Merz and Furman highlight the implications for the other sites when one site fails to fulfil its role in relation to supporting our youth within the community:

Today it is widely assumed that communities and neighbourhoods are in decline and no longer serve the important social roles they once did. Most specifically for the schools, the community at large no longer seems to serve a socialising role for youth (1997:2).

Historically, the concept of community emerged as a '... central concern of several 19<sup>th</sup> century social theorists...' (Merz and Furman, 1997:12) with the changes brought by the industrial revolution. The rate and nature of change has been dramatic during the late twentieth and early twenty first century. Many communities are now in crisis due to the growth of social problems including drugs, crime, and alcohol abuse as well as the loss of family and community networks. Deteriorating community contexts affect the individual, the family and the school. The difficulties experienced in poor, highly stratified communities in urban settings are often compounded by irresponsible planning which has led to high concentrations of local authority housing within urban contexts. Corcoran advises that, 'social segregation ensures that neighbourhoods are divided according to social class and status' (2000:77). This in turn limits transferability of resources across contexts. According to Le Compte and Dworkin, factors such as drugs, violence, abuse and disease 'have a significant bearing on persistence in school, because staying in school is predicated in a belief that the future is possible. These factors lead students to question the validity of that belief' (1991:85).

### 2.5.3.3 Communities differ

The community is a learning arena. The nature of resources, networks, and learning opportunities available to young people impacts on their growth and development. Indeed ‘as children expand their horizons, the living conditions of the neighbourhood and community give them experiences on which to build their linguistic, kinaesthetic, artistic, spatial and interpersonal skills’ (Barbour et al., 1997:14).

The child who grows up in a capital rich community with good quality housing, playgrounds, library facilities, and sports facilities has potentially greater opportunities to learn, to play, and to interact in a safe stimulating environment. These opportunities build their skill base, supporting their academic, social, and personal development. Indeed, Unger and Sussman contend that ‘when families live in close knit neighbourhoods, they frequently empower themselves and become potent constituencies for political and social change’ (1990:3). In contrast, a child growing up in poor housing with little or no physical resources, and even perhaps dangers from the fall out of anti-social behaviour leads a very different lifestyle. This child may have few opportunities to interact socially with peers or caring adults beyond his/her immediate family.

Changes in communities and society have a direct impact on schools. According to Carlson and Apple we are living in ‘unsettling times’ which are ‘characterised by the breakdown of community, the fragmentation of culture, and the more instrumentalization of self within market logic’ (1998:1). Merz and Furman, reference Sergiovanni, who aptly portrays the dilemma and frustration facing schools in the context of the changing society:

though most Principals, superintendents, and teachers have a desire to do better and are working as hard as they can to provide a quality education to every student they serve, the road is rough and the going is slow. The lead villain in this frustrating drama is the loss of community in our schools and in society itself (1997:33).

Community factors may impact negatively on the individual and on the school. Furthermore, they may impact on the family’s ability to support their young. Eccles and Harold contend that it is ‘...harder to do a good job of parenting if one lives in a high-risk neighbourhood or if one is financially stressed’ (1996:9). According to Seaman et al., Laybourn highlighted the ‘time consuming’ approach of parents to parenting, which involved a lot of supervision and a hands-on approach which

facilitated 'dealing with issues as they arose' (2005:8). A review of literature reveals that the nature of the community affects the parenting patterns within families. Eccles and Harold, referring to studies concerned with family management structures in relation to neighbourhood characteristics find that families 'actively involved in their children's development and their children's schooling use different strategies depending on the resources available in their neighbourhood' (1996:8). Basically, families who pro-actively support their children's learning actively protect their children from 'dangers within the neighbourhood' (ibid:8) thus creating an added stress for families living within this context. Indeed they found that families 'rely more on in home management strategies to both help their children develop talents and skills and to protect their children from the dangers in the neighbourhood' (ibid:8).

Finally, Sigel describes the challenges faced by 'poverty level black mothers', and portrays the challenges involved in raising children to survive 'in a hostile environment, both within the ghettos and in a generally racist world' (1983:11). Sigel shares one mother's voice which illuminates the challenges of parents raising children in a high risk environment, '...children have to be reared to be tough, to fight to protect themselves, and to be ever watchful of the police, who will believe them guilty irrespective of their protestations of innocence' (ibid:11).

Communities differ not only in relation to their physical, social, and economic characteristics but also in the types of relationships they have with the schools. Depending on the location and characteristics of the community, business and commercial interests may support the school financially, amenities within the area might be used by the school to enhance their programmes (e.g. swimming pools and sports facilities), and the school may contribute to the accumulation of social and cultural capital in the community by providing learning opportunities for the broader community, even reaching beyond the parents of children in the school.

The type of school-community relationships is dependent on a number of factors including the willingness of the school to develop and nurture relationships within the community. Historical contextual factors such as the age of the school and profile of the community, and the resources that exist within the community and the willingness of community resource gatekeepers to share community resources with the school also impact on this relationship.

#### **2.5.3.4 Community impact on the learner: Role models**

Communities offer different types of role models to its youth. Communities where members have succeeded within the formal education system confirm that educational attainment is an achievable goal, and a realisable outcome. However, young people growing and learning in a community with high rates of school drop out and with negative role models do not as easily receive that positive affirmation within the community. These young people experience a different type of socialisation, and one where the home and school have to work hard to counteract community based negative influences. According to Comer, child development is hampered when ‘neighbourhood and peer conditions are troublesome’ (1980:35). He acknowledges the destructive nature of peer and neighbourhood influences which can counteract ‘good child rearing experiences and positive early school experiences’ (ibid:35), leading to poor school performance.

No one community is a homogenous site. However, high risk, low income communities with high levels of school drop out and high prevalence of crime related activities are not conducive to high levels of engagement within the educational system. Communities where the young leave school early to take up part time or full time low paid employment are also inhibitors of retention within the system, thus perpetuating the cycle of educational disadvantage and poor attainment.

#### **2.5.3.5 Schools reaching out**

Parents and schools sometimes work strategically to counteract community based impediments which impede young people’s progress within the educational system. Henry contends that ‘schools do not exist in isolation from the larger society and that schooling can be revitalised with help from the community’ (1996:15). Community schools work with parents to provide alternative activities for young people in out of school time. Henry profiled the philosophy of an inner city Principal whose school was located in a depressed area, with stereotypical crime and drug problems. The Principal encouraged her teachers to go out into the community. She recognised the physical dangers but advised her teachers to be ‘careful and alert’ (ibid:143). She also recognised that ‘you can’t teach kids in isolation’ (ibid:142). For this Principal, ignoring the context of children’s lives was not an option, becoming familiar with the context and forging relationships and building understanding was a necessity and part of the professional development of her staff.

Community contexts have the potential to enrich children's learning. McAllister Swap acknowledges the potential of community contexts to nurture children's intellectual, social, and physical growth.

Cultural institutions such as museums or theatres, recreation centres, after-school programmes, and enrichment programs can add important dimensions to youngsters' intellectual, social, and physical growth (1993:118).

The school has the potential to build its capacity to provide an holistic service to young people by working proactively with actors in the community. The first step is to understand the community context, the next is to build collaborative practices. Both take time and commitment and a willingness to work with other professionals and agencies in the community for the best interests of the child.

The preceding discussions on the ecologies of home, school and community, specifically in relation to how factors within and between them impede or augment learning accessibility naturally leads to an exploration of initiatives which address accessibility of learning. The limitations of this thesis do not allow for extended exploration and evaluation of initiatives. I will however briefly profile the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL), an Irish initiative and the Community School Movement located in the USA. These are two initiatives relevant to this work. Both aspire to promote positive educational outcomes as a consequence of working in partnership.

## **2.6 The Home School Community Liaison Scheme**

Efforts to develop strong relationships between home and school have been a significant feature of recent policy and practice in Ireland, and current thinking emphasises the complementary roles which parents and teachers play in children's education (OECD, 1997:141).

The Home School Community Liaison scheme (HSCL), an initiative of the Department of Education and Science (DES), was established in 1990. It had an initial staff of 30 co-ordinators working between 55 primary schools in urban designated disadvantaged areas. It was extended to 13 second level schools and a further 25 primary schools in 1991, thus offering a continuity of service to children coming from the primary sector. There are currently 278 primary schools and 188 secondary schools within the scheme. DES describes the HSCL as one of eight schemes put in place to tackle educational disadvantage. The HSCL scheme is now part of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme initiated



in 2005 to co-ordinate and integrate responses to educational disadvantage with a view to maximising outcomes for young people.

### **2.6.1 Aims of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme**

The aims of the HSCL scheme are as follows:

- To maximise active participation of the children in the schools of the scheme in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure;
- To promote active co-operation between home, school, and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children;
- To raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills;
- To enhance the children's uptake from education, their retention in the educational system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their attitudes to life-long learning;
- To disseminate the positive outcomes of the scheme throughout the school system generally. <http://www.education.ie> [accessed 30.10.06].

DES describe the HSCL scheme as a preventative strategy ‘targeted at pupils who are at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system because of background characteristics which tend to affect adversely pupil attainment and school retention’ <http://www.education.ie> [accessed 30.10.06]. The scheme aims to establish partnership with the key stakeholders in the children’s lives by focusing ‘directly on the salient adults in children's educational lives and seeks indirect benefits for the children themselves’ <http://www.education.ie> [accessed 30.10.06].

### **2.6.2 Structure of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme**

A national co-ordinator oversees the development and implementation of the scheme. Participating schools have either a full time or shared co-ordinator depending on school size. Co-ordinators liaise with each other across levels of the educational system.

The local co-ordinator has a role in relation to teacher and parent development and learning opportunities. He/she is an agent of change, working with teachers and parents and between teachers and parents to foster partnership and collaboration. It is envisaged that the school evolves into a ‘community resource’, which offers learning opportunities to children and parents:

The local co-ordinator must address the development of the parent-teacher relationship and collaboration to enhance the nurturing of the whole child. This implies noting personal and leisure needs, and the curricular and learning needs of parents so as to promote their self-worth and self-confidence. Equally, it implies the development of staff and teacher attitudes and behaviour so that the school becomes a community resource (Conaty, 2002:90).

Parents are involved in the scheme at a number of levels. On an informal basis the coordinator visits homes and also meets with parents in the school, often in a designated parents' room. Also, the HSCL schemes co ordinators typically run a variety of adult education classes based on needs identified by the parents themselves. These classes, while not always directly associated with supporting their children's learning, nonetheless recognise the intergenerational impact of learning and facilitate the development of social, cultural, and educational capital within the home. These activities are sometimes supported through the provision of crèche facilities.

Teachers and HSCL co-ordinators work collaboratively and pro actively to build partnerships with parents. According to DES the scheme involves:

- The promotion and establishment of a continuity in the children's transfer from home to school, and from primary to second level;
- An understanding of partnership in the context of the parents' role as the primary educators of their children;
- The development of attitudes and behaviours regarding the complementarity of parents' and teachers' skills, knowledge and experiences in the enhancement of children's learning;
- Joint policy making between parents and teachers on issues such as homework, code of positive behaviour, study skills, attendance, substance misuse and home/school/community liaison. <http://www.education.ie> [accessed 30.10.06].

### **2.6.3 Rationale and Evaluation**

Conaty, the National Co-ordinator believes the profile of young people failing within the system is complex. According to Conaty, 'marginalised pupils may be described as presenting in school with often complex social, emotional, health, and developmental needs that are barriers to learning' (1999:2). They may come from homes 'where poverty exists to such a degree as to preoccupy the family and to effect its ability to enhance life chances' (ibid:2). Many young people living in such circumstances, underachieve or disengage with the attendant loss to the individual, their family, community, and society as a whole. The consequences may culminate in 'apathy, vandalism, substance misuse, joy riding, demotivation, low self-image and alienation' (ibid:2). Conaty contends that 'solutions to the needs of marginalised pupils require a range of services and supports that cut across the boundary of the school, agency services, and government departments' (ibid:3). To address educational failure, DES, through the HSCL scheme, advocate a multi-agency approach, inspired and guided by a partnership philosophy.

The HSCL scheme was evaluated in 1994. Ryan documents the impact of the scheme on primary schools, focusing on parent, staff and community outcomes. According to

Ryan ‘there was less conflict and greater co-operation and consultation on school issues’ (1994:96) between parents and teachers. She found that 80% of schools facilitated the work of the co-ordinator by making space available, and in 60% of schools ‘the school timetable was modified to accommodate and facilitate HSCL work and parent activities’ (ibid:96). The HSCL scheme also had an internal school impact, as 60% of co-ordinators reported that ‘the HSCL programme had helped to improve relationships among staff’ (ibid:96). Externally, ‘in four out of five schools the school was perceived to have a higher profile in the community’ (ibid:96).

#### **2.6.4 Home School Community Liaison Scheme summary**

Both Ryan and subsequently Conaty’s evaluation of the HSCL scheme attest to the enormous potential of strategic partnership-based initiatives to address educational disadvantage. There are implications for all stakeholders if radical changes in learning accessibility, educational attainment and consequently social inclusion is to be achieved. The first step is to recognise that, educational failure is complex, and simply locating blame or the solution to poor educational achievement in one institution, be it the family, school, or indeed community will not bring about the change necessary. The HSCL scheme invests in the school as a springboard to effect change within the school, home, and community. The HSCL scheme seeks to address educational attainment for the child through increased efficacy for teachers and parents, actualised through partnership.

#### **2.7 The Community School Movement in the USA**

The Community School Movement located in USA seeks to increase student attainment through enhanced and strategic co-ordination and collaboration between services, families, and communities. It is ‘both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, services, supports and opportunities leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities’ (Blank et al., 2003:2). School use changes radically as they become ‘centres of the community and are open to everyone - all day, every day, evenings and weekends’ (ibid:2).

Powell sees the school as an ideal multi-service location due to its inherent strengths and ‘contact with, and access to, a large segment of the American population’ (1991:308). Furthermore, school buildings exist in nearly every community, offering

pre existing infrastructure, the stability of the school system and the ‘school’s commitment to standards and professionalism’ (ibid:308).

Partnership is the core principle of the community school movement. Partners ‘represent a range of sectors and embody a rich mosaic of perspectives and experiences’ (Melaville Community schools, Partnerships for Excellence, <http://www.communityschools.org/partnerships.html> accessed 04/04/05:3). Partners work together to build and develop the school. This involves identifying funding sources, designing programmes and services to meet identified needs, delivering and finally evaluating the programmes. An understanding of process and the importance of building relationships are fundamental to this movement. Therefore as partnerships grow and stakeholders gain trust and confidence the extent of collaboration increases.

Funding for community schools comes from a mixture of sources, including state, federal and local government, foundations and corporate sponsors. Furthermore, a range of supports exist for schools wishing to transform from a traditional school model to a community school model. They may link with national and state networks which provide ‘valuable support from technical assistance in planning, start-up and public awareness to training, financing and evaluation’ (Melaville, Community schools, Partnerships for Excellence, <http://www.communityschools.org/partnerships.html> accessed 04/04/05:5).

### **2.7.1 Aims of the Community School Movement**

According to Dryfoos and Maguire, ‘educational enrichment is offered in the context of overcoming social and economic barriers to learning’ (2002:xvi). Therefore, there is a political agenda at play, as community schools aspire to educational outcomes and attendant life chances for young people and their families from within marginalised communities. According to the Children’s Aid Society, community schools work to achieve the following results:

1. Children are ready to learn when they enter school and every day thereafter;
2. All students learn and achieve to high standards;
3. Young people are well prepared for adult roles as workers, parents, and citizens;
4. Families and neighbourhoods are safe, supportive, and engaged;
5. Parents and community members are involved with the school and their own life long learning.

(Children’s Aid Society : Frequently Asked Questions)

According to Wescott Dodd and Kozal the Community School Movement ‘integrates the well-being of the community as a whole with the reform of schools’ (2002:281). Blank et al. contend that ‘by sharing expertise and resources, schools and communities act in concert to transform traditional schools into permanent partnerships for excellence’ (2003:2). This process involves locating services within the school building, as well as systematic networking, collaboration, and information sharing between partners. The basic idea is to ‘remove burdens from schools by building partnerships’ (Dryfoos and Maguire, 2002:xvi). The public school is the epicentre where:

...inventive, enduring relationships among educators, families, community volunteers business, health and social service agencies, youth development organisations and others committed to children are changing the educational landscape – permanently – by transforming traditional schools into partnerships for excellence (Melaville, Community schools, Partnerships for Excellence, <http://www.communityschools.org/partnerships.html> accessed 04042005:1).

### **2.7.2 Structures and programmes**

A full time community school co-ordinator plays a key role in the co-ordination of services between agencies and also as an active agent in the management of the school. In fact the school Principal and co-ordinator work in tandem to ensure an holistic learning service is offered to the community.

The community school differs from the traditional model in that ‘it is orientated towards the community’ (Melaville, Community schools, Partnerships for Excellence, <http://www.communityschools.org/partnerships.html> accessed 04042005:2). The range of services differ between individual community schools but a typical model provides services to parents, students, and community members. Students avail of support services before and after school, as well as holiday provision. A family support centre may help families with ‘child rearing, employment, housing and other services’ (Melaville, Community schools, Partnerships for Excellence, <http://www.communityschools.org/partnerships.html> accessed 04042005:2). Parent involvement is a core aspect of community school ethos where:

parents are welcomed and encouraged to get involved in their children’s education, as well as take adult education classes, get advice and support, learn how to help their children succeed in school, meet other parents and create their own programmes, support groups and activities (The Children’s Aid Society, Community Schools, Information Sheet:1).

Furthermore, medical, dental, and mental health services are located in the school and access to these services is negotiated between the parents, Principal and co-ordinator. Community schools invest systematically in children's success. According to The Children's Aid Society:

Community schools extend opportunities for children to succeed in school by adding the kinds of resources that have been demonstrated to make a difference: increased parental involvement in children's education; extra learning opportunities through educational enrichment; consistent access to adult guidance and support; and ready access to health, dental and mental health services (The Children's Aid Society, Community Schools: Frequently Asked Questions:1).

### **2.7.3 A learning framework**

The Coalition for Community Schools presents a learning framework based on five conditions they identify as necessary for 'learning to effectively take place'. Community schools are designed to meet these learning conditions, and depending on the unique circumstances of individual schools, each site will invest in the development of each of the conditions as the needs dictate.

The first condition relates to the traditional business of teaching and requires that 'the school has a core instructional programme with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students' (Blank et al., 2003:15). The second condition relates to the students, and requires that 'the students are motivated and engaged in learning – both in school and in community settings, during and after school' (ibid:15). The third condition requires that 'the basic physical, mental and emotional health needs of young people and their families are recognised and addressed' (ibid:15). The fourth condition relates to the types of relationships communication patterns, and requires that 'there is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents, families and school staff' (ibid:15). Finally, the fifth condition acknowledges the holistic nature of the approach and requires that 'community engagement, together with school efforts, promote a school climate that is safe, supportive and respectful and that connects students to a broader learning community' (ibid:15). These conditions conspire to create an environment in which learning is accessible.

### **2.7.4 Evaluation**

Thus far I have attempted to discuss the aims, philosophy, processes, learning conditions and funding attributes of Community Schools. How well does the Community School Movement achieve its aims? The philosophy aspires to

transformative outcomes for students, schools, parents and communities. Is this too big a remit? Realistically, what is achievable and how can those achievements be measured?

Blank et al. advocate investment in Community Schools since they believe community schools have greater outcomes than the traditional 'act alone' model.

They contend that community schools can:

Garner additional resources and reduce the demands on school staff. Provide learning opportunities that develop both academic and non-academic competencies. Build social capital - the networks and relationships that support learning and create opportunity for young people while strengthening their communities (2003:7).

In '*Making the Difference*' Blank et al. present research findings from 'multiple fields and disciplines' along with very extensive community school research to build a comprehensive case for the promotion and expansion of community schools. They present their findings of this meta analysis by defining the impact of Community Schools on young people, families, schools and communities. They note that not all findings are evident in each site, a factor attributable in part perhaps to the diverse nature of the evaluations. I will now summarise their findings.

Firstly, I will explore the impact of community schools on young people. The twenty Community School evaluations all focused on improving outcomes for young people, with a significant focus on academic outcomes. The following summarises the outcomes for young people:

1. Improved grades in school courses and /or scores in proficiency testing;
2. Improved attendance;
3. Reduced behaviour or discipline problems and/or suspensions/expulsions;
4. Increased access to physical and mental health services and preventative care;
5. Greater classroom cooperation, completion of homework and assignments, adherence to school rules, and positive attitude;
6. Greater contact with supportive adults;
7. Improvements in personal or family situation, abuse, or neglect;
8. Increased promotions and on-time graduations;
9. Increased sense of personal control over academic success;
10. Decrease in self-destructive behaviours, including irresponsible sexual activity and drug use;
11. Reduced dropout rate;
12. Increased sense of attachment and responsibility to the community;
13. Increased sense of school connectedness;
14. Strengthened social and public speaking skills;
15. Increased capacity for self-direction;
16. Positive effects on educational aspirations and credit accumulation.

(Blank et al., 2003:40)

The outcomes profiled above reveal impacts in the personal, academic, social and family life of the student. While not all centres reported all of the outcomes, and this report amalgamates and summarises diverse reports, nonetheless the impact is significant, life changing, and life enhancing.

The second field which the meta analysis explored was the impact of Community Schools on families. The following summarises results of eleven studies that measured impacts on families:

1. Improved communication with schools and teachers;
2. Improved stability and/or other outcomes related to basic housing, food, transportation and employment needs;
3. Increased ability to work more hours, miss work less or to move from part-time to full-time work;
4. Increased confidence for parents in their role as their child's teacher;
5. Greater attendance at school meetings;
6. Increased knowledge of children's development;
7. Strong sense of responsibility for children's schooling;
8. Decreased family violence;
9. Increased civic participation;
10. Improvements in adult literacy.

(Blank et al., 2003:41)

The research results outlined above indicate that family involvement with the community schools impacts positively on the nature of relationships between family and schools, as well as on the skill level of adults, and the quality of life within the family.

The impact of community schools on schools themselves is the third site of impact evaluation. The following summarises the findings of twelve evaluations, which measured the impact on schools:

1. Principal and staff affirmation of on-site services as an important resource;
2. Increased parental participation in children's learning;
3. Growth in nonpartisan support for public education and increased resources through increased community partnerships;
4. Teacher recognition of parent participation as an asset;
5. Increased classroom emphasis on creative project-based learning connected to the community and innovation in teaching and curriculum;
6. School environments are more cheerful and orderly; there is increased perception of safety;
7. Services well integrated into the daily operation of schools;
8. Teachers spend more time on class preparation and working with students;
9. Improvements in teacher attendance.

(Blank et al., 2003:42)



The above attest to improvements in school atmosphere, collaboration between parents and teachers, well-being and job satisfaction and efficacy.

The fourth and final field of impact is on the community itself. Blank et al. describe a symbiotic relationship between schools and community, where resources flow between sites nurturing and building capacity among stakeholders. Benefits to families have already been described and these benefits contribute to the stability and quality of life in the community. The outcomes for community, gleaned from eleven evaluations are profiled as follows:

1. Increased community knowledge and improved perception of initiative;
2. Increased community use of school buildings, more family awareness of community agencies, and greater community access to facilities previously unknown or unaffordable;
3. Improved security and safety in surrounding area;
4. Strengthened community pride and identity, engagement of citizens and students in school and community service.

(Blank et al., 2003:3)

The outcomes profiled above attest to an improved quality of life, effective use of resources, and greater identification with the neighbourhood.

Blank's meta analysis builds a strong case for the development and support of Community Schools as a comprehensive response to making learning accessible for young people, their families and teachers. Impacts on young people, family, school and community all attest to improved quality of life, safer and more stimulating working, living, and learning environments and increased efficacy for parents and teachers.

Community Schools have been profiled as an effective strategic response to making learning attainable through systemic practices and partnership relationships. Dryfoos and Maguire, a researcher and a school principal, offer some insight into the barriers or challenges which exist to the development of a community school. Many of the barriers can be foreseen and negotiated during the planning stages. On the other hand, solutions sometimes evolve as the programme grows, such as teachers' objection to the use of classrooms after school hours which may fade as teachers see the benefits to children accruing from attendance at after school programmes. With reference to a broad field of research Dryfoos and Maguire catalogue the barriers which exist and these include:

1. Lack of space: the age, design and existing facilities within a school building may hamper developments;
2. Turf- ownership of space: teachers may feel their classrooms belong to them and are not available for activities outside of school hours;
3. Maintenance: who takes responsibility for maintenance and security as the school hours extend;
4. Transportation: bus services need to link to programme timetables;
5. Inequality: equality of access to programmes, do the children who most need the support get the places in the extended programmes;
6. Confidentiality: the challenge to share information across disciplines while respecting the confidentiality rights of the students and their families;
7. Discipline: school and youth service personnel may deal with behaviour issues differently, there is a need for consistency and shared understanding across contexts;
8. The need for integration: integration of services, so there is transferable learning across in school and out of school programmes;
9. Sufficient funding: the demands involved in the struggle for funding leaches precious energy from other responsibilities;
10. Replication difficulties: need for on-going technical support;
11. Nay Sayers: what is the role of the school? Are schools going beyond their remit, taking medical, dental, nutritional and mental health services into the school building, does this detract from the academic agenda?
12. Lack of visibility: the need to address the misconception that bringing services into schools increases the workload of the school, rather than supporting the school to concentrate on academic matters while other services look after the other needs of students (Dryfoos and Maguire, 2002: 147-155).

Community Schools working from an inclusive philosophy offer teachers, students and their families a model of working and learning which enriches all stakeholders. As Powell notes ‘the opportunity for growth is to assume that the resources of schools can be recast and applied in ways that foster mutually supportive connections with families and communities’ (1991:317).

## **2.8 Partnership**

Thus far I investigated the three individual ecologies of home, school and community which relate to the micro system within Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework. In so doing I acknowledged the critical importance and interdependence of each site in relation to learning accessibility. An understanding of interdependence is critical to informing educational policy and intervention. Indeed Macbeth and Ravn reject short-sighted policy makers who ‘concentrate their policies on schools’ and neglect the ‘learning which the child acquires outside the school’ (1994:4).

In December 2007 the newsletter of the Family School Community Partnership project declared that ‘working in partnership is not for the fainthearted’ (2007: 4). Developing and sustaining partnership between the sites of home, school and community is both challenging and complex. Realistically, links already exist between sites, as children, parents, and teachers daily weave their way through a web

of ecologies bringing their experiences, responsibilities, aspirations, problems, and talents with them. However, developing partnerships takes time, patience, understanding, and commitment, since ‘each family has a history, each school has a history, and so does the connection between them’ (Connell et al.: 1982:42). According to Dowling and Pound ‘often a family and school have a long history of dissatisfaction with each other and with the child’ (1985:69), and this will influence the nature of communication between them. Indeed they contend that relations between families and schools may be particularly constrained when children have ‘social or educational difficulties, is unhappy or disobedient or slow to learn’ and in that situation ‘each side of the school-family partnership can relieve its disappointment and sense of failure by judging the other to have been deficient in its task’ (ibid:69). This judgemental adversarial attitude that can reside within any of the ecologies will not easily foster partnership practice and cooperation, thereby jeopardising the prospects for enhanced learning outcomes.

Parents, children, and teachers all stand to benefit from effective partnership practices. Planned strategic parental involvement in schools holds the potential to produce outstanding results, including increased attendance, raised academic achievement, and decrease in behaviour problems. Hanafin and Lynch identify two distinctive strands of parental involvement within the Irish school system. Firstly, they identify an intervention strand, which is ‘explicitly ‘classed’ and aimed at working class parents. The rationale for this strand ‘derives from a cultural deficit model’ as an explanation for educational failure (2002:35). Secondly they identify a general strand which is directed at all parents. Partnership, as espoused in my study, however, operates from an emancipatory paradigm applicable to either specific interventions or to the daily relations between the home and school.

### **2.8.1 Partnership as a tool for progress**

In this section I explore the interrelationship between sites through the theme of partnership, corresponding to Bronfenbrenner’s meso system. Partnership, enacted through strategic relationships is advanced as a tactical mechanism to address impediments to learning accessibility and learning attainment.

Educational partnership may be conceptualised on a number of levels, local, national, and international. Deegan et al. analyse educational partnership at national level within the Irish context. They identify an exclusive group of key players which

includes the teacher unions, churches, and government. These stakeholders engage with ‘decision making bodies such as policy committees, review bodies, and curriculum boards’ (2004:4). Deegan et al. reject the exclusivity of this select group and contend that ‘there is no place in the current partnership model for the inclusion of groups representing the interests of minorities, including those from ethnic minority groups, those from minority beliefs, those who are differently abled and, of course, children’ (ibid:4).

While acknowledging the importance and impact of partnership practice, or indeed the lack of it, at national and international level, it is beyond the bounds of this thesis to explore all levels of partnership within the educational sphere. Therefore I concentrate on issues of partnership and relate it to the three sites already discussed, conscious that decisions made at other levels affect the capacity of these sites to successfully negotiate and develop effective working relationships.

### **2.8.2 Partnership: Definition and rationale**

Partnership has a number of core attributes which resonate across definitions. These include attention to power relations, respect, sharing of information, and finally empathic practice. In highlighting the need to identify the guiding philosophical principles of any intervention Kellaghan et al. contrast former intervention parental programmes which operated out of a deficit model with more recent models which ‘introduced the concepts of partnership and empowerment, ... The concept of partnership means that parties should work together’ (1993:92). Lareau defines partnership as, ‘... a relationship between equals where power and control is evenly distributed’ (2000:35). Vincent sees partnership as a ‘diffuse concept’ and contends that it ‘implies a broad spectrum of ideas embracing equality, consensus, harmony and joint endeavour’ (1996:3). Pugh and De’Ath’s definition, adopted by the Department of Education and Science (DES) defines partnership as a working relationship ‘characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect, and the willingness to negotiate ... a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision-making and accountability (1989:68). Indeed, this understanding is closely aligned to the concept of empowerment, defined by Cochran and Dean as:

An internal on-going process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources (1991:266).

If the process of partnership and empowerment is to be embraced, stakeholders must address issues of power, relationships, resources, and decision-making processes. Furthermore, the concept of equality between partners is a challenging one which proves problematic on a number of fronts, not least of which is the concept of professionalism for the teacher partners. Teachers may feel that working in partnership is not part of their job, and may feel defensive within this relationship as ‘they lead very stressful, demanding and exposed working lives, as schools have not always developed good support strategies....’ (OECD, 1997:53). According to Henry, ‘education has become inbred and inward looking’, and teachers are not accustomed to working in partnership with other stakeholders (1996:134). Furthermore, Macbeth and Ravn highlight the necessity of developing a shared understanding of partnership:

There has been much talk of ‘partnership with parents’, but the term is used loosely and is often applied to quite minor contact which are initiated and controlled by teachers for the convenience of schools (1994:10).

The INTO advocate a collaborative approach to enhance achievement and professional relations thereby ensuring that responsibilities for learning and attainment are shared responsibilities between key agents. They contend that if responsibilities reside solely with teachers they could be held responsible for educational failure if and when it does occur:

Should teachers and schools fail to involve parents in the education of their children they risk creating the impression that schools alone determine educational success or failure and will have to accept blame for educational failure when in reality many of the reasons for such failure lie beyond the responsibility and influence of the school (INTO, 1997:111).

### **2.8.3 Outcomes of working in partnership**

My review of the literature revealed significant positive outcomes for the child, family, school, and community when effective partnership is achieved. Furthermore, I found that partnership was advanced as a political tool with the potential to address societal inequality. Davies contends that our two tiered society, ‘one affluent, generally well-educated, and optimistic; the other poor, increasingly isolated, badly educated, and despairing’ (1993b:205) can be transformed through educational attainment, which is facilitated through partnership. Partnership is necessary since:

The schools obviously can’t address the problem alone; neither can low income and minority families. Schools and families need each other, and they need other community resources and support. New forms of family, school, and community partnerships are needed (Davies, 1993b:205).

McCaleb also acknowledges the political component of partnership and views partnership as ‘integral to a philosophy of transformative education’ (1994:40). Paratore, Melzi & Krol- Sinclair, cited in Barbour et al. argue that poor children’s challenge to succeed educationally can be bolstered through strategic parent teacher interaction since ‘for these [poor] children, success in school was a complex process, dependent both on the actions of parents and teachers separately, and perhaps more importantly, on their interactions (1997:156). Kellaghan et al. acknowledge ‘the limited success of school-based reform’ (1993:8) and contend that ‘... a concern of much thinking on education in the last decade has been to determine how the school can share its responsibilities with other institutions...’ (ibid:8).

The OECD publication, ‘*Parents as Partners in Schooling*’, provides a rationale for collaboration which acknowledges the enhanced potential for achievement, ‘Children, parents, teachers and the community can all achieve more if they co-operate with each other’ (1997:57). The publication connects the mobilisation of partnership to raising educational achievements, which in turn relates to improved employment prospects. Ultimately the proposal advocates investment in partnership development in order to ‘raise educational achievement among children and adults ...’ (ibid:59). Bronfenbrenner creates a strategic link between the ‘nature of ties between the school and the home’ and academic outcomes for the child, noting that ‘a child’s ability to learn to read in the primary grades may depend no less on how he is taught than on the existence and nature of ties between the school and the home’ (1979:3). He observes that the efficacy of individual settings can be augmented or depleted by the nature of communication between settings:

the capacity of a setting such as the home, school, or workplace – to function effectively as a context for development is seen to depend on the existence and nature of social interconnections between setting, including joint participation, communication, and the existence of information in each setting about the other (1979:5).

Henry’s rationale for collaboration includes benefits to the learner, the home and the school. She acknowledges that teachers ‘can learn from parents’ intimate knowledge of their children’ (1996:15), and that relationships between all players can and do improve. Furthermore she contends that parents can ‘provide much needed resources’ (ibid:16) including financial and political support. Her most fervent argument relates to the increased academic performance of learners on foot of positive collaboration. In an overview of the benefits of collaboration to the wider field of education she

believes that an openness for diverse perspectives would enable better decision making, since 'Education has become inbred and inward looking to the extent that educators talk mostly to other educators' (ibid:134).

Conversely, when homes, schools, or communities do not fulfil their duties there is an immediate knock-on effect within the connected ecologies. According to Olsen and Fuller 'when families are struggling and in crisis, schools will need to step in by networking and collaborating with community to gain access to services and resources to strengthen families and children's success in learning' (2003:150).

The three sites of home, school, and community are intrinsically connected, and positive or negative factors impacting on any one site has a knock on effect within the other sites. Their connectivity is a given, the quality of their relationship is not. Epstein contends that the benefits of working in partnership extend to all three sites, with the learner as key beneficiary. For the school working in partnership can mean an improvement in 'school programs and school climate', for the families it can 'increase parents skills and leadership', and from a community perspective it can 'connect people' (2001:403).

Wescott Dodd and Konzal profile the positive outcomes when 'schools take seriously the importance of building on-going two way communication with parents and other community members' (2002:40). They believe that because of the 'foundation of trust and respect that has been developed' (ibid:40), the school will enjoy greater co-operation in solving problems and implementing new programmes. According to Henderson and Berla parents' and teachers' efforts to 'understand and respect each other' help the child 'feel comfortable with who they are' and facilitates them to 'reconcile their experiences at home and at school' (1994:11). Haynes and Ben-Avie also profile the benefits of collaborative practice, in terms of parent, school and community outcomes. Teacher outcomes include increased knowledge of the 'socio-cultural communities served by the school' (1996:45), which in turn informs practice and leads to improvements in 'classroom climate, ... teacher's sense of efficacy and more effective classroom management strategies and pedagogy' (ibid:45).

Parental outcomes include both personal outcomes such as becoming 'motivated to further their own education' (Haynes, Ben-Avie, 1996:45) and increased skills to help their children. Positive experiences of involvement for parents can be transformative,

enabling them to shed negative previous experiences and see the school as ‘a bastion of hope for their children and for themselves’ (ibid:45), a factor explored in section 2.5.1.8.

Potential school outcomes include a renewed energy injected into school processes through parental involvement. If parents become empowered through active involvement and if schools can shed their inward looking stance, this new energy and commitment may be translated into collaborative activity reaching out into the community. Henry contends that ‘schools do not exist in isolation from the larger society and that schooling can be revitalised with help from the community’ (1996:15). However, this involves a radical reappraisal within school and community sites if this potential development is to be realised.

The OECD report ‘*Parents as Partners in Schooling*’ identifies the long term and systemic benefits of working in partnership. This report concludes that the benefits of working in partnership extend beyond immediate results of positive relationships to making a strategic lifelong difference to young people playing their full role in society and adults embracing opportunities for life long learning, ‘... if the young are to be educated to play their full role in society, and if their parents are to be given a chance to continue learning, partnership is the only way forward’ (OECD, 1997:57).

#### **2.8.4 Barriers to effective partnership**

While the value of partnership is well established it is simply a fact that, ‘partnerships of any kind are complex’ (Pugh and D’Ath, 1989:67). I now explore some of the barriers which exist to developing successful partnership. Before doing so however, the school must again be acknowledged as the site invested with the greatest power and responsibility in relation to initiating, harnessing, and sustaining partnership. Barriers to developing partnership may be located within the home, school and community contexts, as well of course as within the wider national and international contexts.

The very nature of schools ‘prevents parents and teachers from productively working together’ (Wescott Dodd and Konzal, 2002:23). Within a traditional school system, power to make decisions is usually invested in a few people and teachers and parents or indeed children have little or no power in decision making. Bureaucratic structures



affect the quality of interaction between parents and teachers, and Wescott Dodd and Konzal contend that interaction occurs ‘in a formal and ritualistic ways, preventing them from having the kinds of informal interactions necessary for building trusting relationships’ (ibid:24). Barriers are also created through the underlying school ethos. Schools operating from a ‘medical model’ (Haynes and Ben-Avie, 1996:50) approach which locates blame for underachievement solely outside the school context may opt to work in isolation and will not nurture collaborative actions. Rather they will preserve their own environment believing it reflects their professionalism. Dowling and Pound highlight the implications of poor pre-existing parent-teacher relationships when a problem arises. They contend that ‘parent-teacher meetings can become a confrontation rather than a dialogue’, only adding to the already negative relationships (1985: 70). Henry decries the ‘walling out of community as a response to professionalisation of teaching’ (1996:15). Finally, Fine critiques the trend to invite parents ‘into the deficit-ridden public sphere of public education ... “as if” it were a ‘power-neutral partnership’(1993:682).

Lareau’s and Pugh and De’Ath’s definition of partnership draws our attention to the issue of power. A review of the literature in this area indicates that ultimately power to harness partnership rests with teachers and schools. Therefore if partnership is to be forged schools must be supported to develop partnership strategies and practices. Conaty’s research with HSCL co ordinators illuminates this point. One co ordinator, reflecting on the processes of building partnership ‘held that ‘teachers have an elevated status’, and that ‘ partnership involves taking a step back from that’ (Conaty, 2002:143). Some schools more readily embrace the opportunity to develop and support partnerships. Others are more reticent to change old practices. There are many issues entangled in this debate, including issues of professionalism, power sharing and assuming responsibilities. Dryfoos and Mc Guire acknowledge the growing pains associated with the changing status of relationships between teachers and parents stating that ‘it takes a great deal of effort to share decision making and let go of turf issues’ (2002:115).

While structural, historical, and geographical contexts may create barriers to partnership it must be remembered that people are at the centre of this concern. Developing partnership and harnessing relationships is a human endeavour. And being human we are all vulnerable and susceptible to misunderstandings and hurt

which can occur in the process. As Coleman simply states, 'Parents and teachers have the power to cause the other distress' (1998: 14).

While acknowledging the powerful position held by schools to broker partnership, Henry raises a sinister element in this debate. She challenges us to examine whether teachers treat children of parents who are actively involved in schooling more favourably than children whose families remain outside the realm of partnership, thus contributing to inequality:

Equality becomes an issue if the scales are tipped in favour of enhanced outcomes for those students whose parents are involved in schooling when not all parents are able to participate equally (1996:6).

This of course raises issues around how teachers working in disadvantaged schools interpret parent interest and project middle class assumptions and norms into their relationships. I have dealt with this issue in previous discussions but it is also relevant in this debate. The INTO acknowledge the danger of teachers judging parental interest in their offspring's education from the norm of a middle class perspective stating that '...it would be wrong to conclude that parents in disadvantaged areas are not interested in their children's education or do not value education for their children' (1994:98). Olsen and Fuller acknowledge the dangers of stereotyping children which can lead to reduced effort and lowered expectations for children from lower socio economic contexts. They also acknowledge the potential for teachers to contribute to improved quality of life of children and families and to professional growth for teachers:

...well-informed teachers will not be influenced by the stereotypes of poor children. Educators that are knowledgeable and skilful can add to the quality of life for these children and their families and grow professionally themselves (2003:285).

The power barrier between teachers and parents manifests itself in a number of ways. According to Lareau parents are cognisant of the power and influence of teachers beyond the immediate school environment which can hinder the development of parental trust:

This greater power of teachers over parents is not simply in their decisions about children at school but also in their potential authority to turn them in to the Department of Human Services (1996:61).

The OECD publication, *Parents as Partners in Schooling* recognises the volatile nature of relationships and the potential for damage thus decreasing chances of open communication between parties, stating that ‘over critical parents can damage relationships by forcing teachers onto the defensive, making them unwilling to be open and reflective about their practice’ (1997:53). This can happen from both sides, but when teachers trust is either wounded or underdeveloped the implications for the relationship between teachers and parents are serious, since teachers are the most likely gatekeepers and instigators of partnership processes.

Within community contexts there are also barriers to the development of partnership. Teachers who do not traditionally come from the community in which they serve must gain the trust and acceptance of both parents and community people. If teachers are simply driving into the community to work and driving out again with minimal contact they will not easily harness and develop the trust of the community. If, however, they are open to becoming involved in community-based activities outside the school, and willing to open up the school to the community, they will create a forum for the development of trust and understanding.

### **2.8.5 The dissenting voice**

The literature reveals that teachers expect parents to support their children through homework and if the opportunity is presented through school involvement. de Carvalho strongly challenges the partnership model and familial policy focus espoused by Epstein and others. She believes that in garnering such practices we deny the ‘specificity of schooling within modern education, blurring the distinction between formal and informal education’ (2001:18). She is concerned that the ‘professional status of teachers’ (ibid:19) is overlooked and furthermore that the models of partnership are based on a single family model where the mother is full time carer and the family do not suffer economic hardship. She describes her own experiences as a parent of three children who does not embrace the expectations of the school. She rejects the imposition of the school curriculum in her home, and feels that the worlds of family, culture, and leisure are invaded by the projected agenda of the school.

### **2.8.6 Partnership summary**

There is overwhelming evidence that working in partnership offers schools, homes and communities opportunities to build skills and capacity and foster positive outcomes for learners. There is no doubt that the school plays a pivotal role in fostering and nurturing that partnership. The barriers to building partnership are very real, but not insurmountable. Factors located in the home, school and community may impede partnership practices. However, strategic partnerships can be and have been built which have fostered productive outcomes for all involved. Teachers and principals in particular need support, resources and training to enable them to develop partnership practices within the school and between the school and other sites.

### **2.9 Summary**

This chapter began by proposing a socio-ecological framework to inquire into factors which affect the accessibility of learning. I explored the three ecologies of home, school, and community in terms of how factors within them contribute to or impede learning accessibility. Two interventions, the Home School, Community Liaison scheme in Ireland and the Community School Movement in the USA were profiled as examples of partnership inspired interventions designed to promote learning accessibility. I explored relationships between sites under the theme of partnership, acknowledging both the positive outcomes and barriers which exist to developing and nurturing proactive partnership between home, school, and community in making learning accessible.

### **2.10 Chapter conclusion**

The socio-ecological framework informing this chapter has been useful on a number of fronts. It facilitated an exploration of factors affecting the accessibility of learning by focusing on the micro ecologies of home, school and community through a capital lens and the mesosystemic dynamic of partnership. Harker acknowledges the struggle for attainment, easily interpreted as a competition for capital acquisition, within the educational system. He warns that it cannot be understood in isolation from other 'fields in the social space' (1990:99). This ecological perspective contextualises educational attainment and acknowledges the importance of 'other fields in social space'. The exosystemic and macrosystemic factors such as poverty, culture,

parentocracy and class privilege, all play interdependent roles as gatekeepers in the accumulation of capital.

A lot has been written in recent years about the personal, community, and societal impact of poor educational achievement. Poor educational achievement is closely linked to poverty and reduced life chances. Children from all backgrounds must be facilitated to achieve in school, not only for their own good but also for that of society. The levels of educational achievement are closely related to class origin. Children from working class contexts do not achieve educationally relative to their peers in higher SES contexts. It is not enough to increase attendance rates and the age at which children leave the school system. Children must be facilitated to achieve and excel not relative to their social class origin but to their ability. I believe that working in partnership from an integrated multi-agency approach may be one route to facilitate learning accessibility. This demands resourcing at many levels. Commitment to children's academic and personal achievement must be manifested through generous resourcing to enable schools, homes, and community agents located in socio-economically poor areas to work collaboratively and effectively for children.



**CHAPTER THREE**  
**METHODOLOGY: BEYOND TOOLS OF INQUIRY**





### **3. METHODOLOGY: BEYOND TOOLS OF INQUIRY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I provide a rationale for the selection of research methods employed in this study. I subsequently define and describe the research methods and methodology employed to address the core research question. I present a philosophical framework located within the feminist emancipatory research paradigm (FER), which informs the selection of research methodologies and instruments. This is necessary because ‘methods are not passive strategies’ (Fine and Weis, 1996:267). I hold the position that ‘field work is [a]deeply human as well as a scientific experience and a detailed knowledge of both aspects is an important source of data in itself’ (Powdermaker, 1966:9). The adoption of FER principles facilitates the collection, analysis, and presentation of research in a mode loyal to the principles of Kileely Community Project (KCP) and to my own beliefs. According to Byrne and Lentin ‘feminist research methodology gives us permission to be explicit about the problems we encounter, as we seek to reduce the possibility of further exploitation in our research relationship with other human beings’ (2000:10). Chapter Four, ‘Data Sources and Collection Process’, profiles the extent and nature of data collected and analysed for this study. Interviews in the form of individual and focus group sessions were the primary source of information. Extensive secondary data sources included print, visual and audio field texts. Grounded theory was generated through grounded theory methodologies (GTM).

#### **3.2 Purpose of this research**

The purpose of this research is to understand and evaluate the impact of KCP on people’s lives, specifically but not exclusively in relation to learning accessibility, and to discover the factors which enabled these outcomes. Qualitative data collection methodologies were largely employed. Hitchcock and Hughes contend that, ‘qualitative research is not explicitly about the verification of existing theories and hypotheses, but rather with *discovery*’ (1989:297). Mruck and Mey embrace qualitative methods ‘in times of social change and globalisation’ and contend that quantitative methods are of limited use since ‘they are primarily useful with regard to theories and hypotheses derived from existing and established theories’ (2007: 515). This study explores the processes involved in the foundation and long-term

sustainability of KCP. In addition, it explores impact at individual, family, school, and community level.

Fundamentally, this thesis contributes to the development of knowledge in the area of educational intervention through engagement with the lived experiences of a variety of stakeholders. My narrative study ‘consists of obtaining and then reflecting on people’s lived experience and ... is inherently a relational endeavour’ (Josselson, 2007:537). Fundamentally, ‘the final result is a story’ (Clandinin and Murphy, 2007:636).

### **3.3 Research objectives.**

The study adopts an ecological perspective and seeks to generate an understanding of the factors within the home, school and community that affect accessibility to learning for adults and children. Furthermore, it explores the relationship between these sites through the theme of partnership. Partnership, understood as a mechanism to address and enhance learning accessibility, is explored in Chapter Two ‘A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility’. This study then evaluates the effectiveness of KCP to effect change in learning accessibility for adults and children. This evaluation is conceptualised at an individual level, a family level, a community level, and a school level.

Within this text I aim to represent the lived experiences of participants harnessed through a narrative process. Furthermore I aim to share the co created knowledge generated through this research process. I propose to do so in a way that avoids the trap of sensationalising poor people’s lives (Fine and Weis, 1996). I am conscious that in the transition from field text to research text the researcher holds ultimate responsibility for representation. This responsibility is complex. Fine and Weis, for example, grapple with the dilemma of representing the lives of poor and working class men and women. They acknowledge the dangers implicit in displaying the ‘voyeuristic dirty laundry that litters our data bases’, in a context in which the State has launched ‘an assault on poor and working-class families’ (Fine and Weis, 1996:259), thus acknowledging the political and complex nature of representation.

### **3.4 Rationale for the development of a research framework: Risks, responsibility, and relationships**

#### **3.4.1 Research as a political tool**

Research is a political tool, 'be it by default, by design, or by recognition' (Lynch, 2000: 73). It is precisely because it is a political tool that it is necessary to consider not only the methodologies employed, but also the philosophy guiding any study. This is particularly pertinent given the experiences of marginalised communities which in the past have frequently had their experiences appropriated by researchers. Daly decries research shortcomings particularly in relation to understanding women's poverty and cautions that 'research can conceal as well as reveal' (1989:10). And, this is possible because implicit in the research process are issues of power and representation. Conscious of the political and potentially transformative impact of research studies, Fine and Weis contend that 'researchers can no longer afford to collect information on communities without that information benefiting those communities in their struggles for equity, participation, and representation (1996: 271). The centrality, as opposed to neutrality, of the relationships between researchers and participants must be addressed as a key site of power. Researchers need to be vigilant that research relationships do not mirror power relationships in society, which, according to hooks, are 'equated with domination and control over people and things' (1984:84).

According to Banks, 'social research has to be an engagement, not an exercise in data collection' (2001:179). The potential to either abuse or affirm research participants, intentionally or inadvertently, is inherent in any research process. Fonow and Cook warn the researcher to be aware of danger of betraying their informants since the research participants 'are often not in a position to control how the data will be used' (1991: 8). In contrast, the researcher is in a position of power. Lentin identifies three caveats when presenting auto/biographical narratives. Firstly, the researcher must broker a shared interpretation representative of the participants' visions and the researcher's understanding. Secondly, 'narratives must be understood as products and reflections of the negotiation between the narrators and researchers'. Finally, the researcher must not seek to eradicate ambiguities but to incorporate them (Lentin, 2000:257). This sentiment is very much echoed by Fine and Deegan who, with reference to Agar's work caution against 'placing disproportionate emphases on

harmony to the exclusion of conflict in ethnographic sense-making' (Fine and Deegan, 1996:436). The manner in which research is conducted, processed, and presented may either be inclusive and transparent, or alienating to the very subjects of the study, a process labelled colonisation by Lynch (2000:80). Mc Donagh describes the destructive impact of research on her minority community as an act of violence:

We as travellers were being used in order to provide information. That information was then interpreted and written in a way that excluded us from our own experiences, and almost annihilated us (2000:239).

O'Neill decries the disempowerment of research participants by researchers who abuse their privileged position and further their careers:

We are the subject of books and papers  
Our lives recorded by the middle-class  
Who steal our stories, use our oppression  
To serve their own need; they won't let us pass (2000:105).

Informed research practice can contribute to our understanding of our own world and offer an insight into diverse worlds. At a proactive level it has the potential to contribute to the personal development of both the researcher and participants and to the transformation of worlds.

O'Neill contends that working class culture is 'neither fully understood nor properly documented' (2000:106). This thesis, situated within a working class culture, offers an insight into how and why this community responded to the challenge to address its own learning needs. This research asks participants to enter into dialogue, to engage actively with the research process, and to claim and name their world. Freire advocates dialogue as a tool of empowerment, and defines dialogue as a 'horizontal relationship between persons' (1974: 40). The desire and responsibility to act with integrity throughout the process led me to the field of feminist emancipatory research, a philosophy which would guide, support, and inform the research journey.

### **3.5 Feminist Emancipatory Research**

The starting point in selecting research approaches to address the research question is embedded in the personal belief system of the researcher, since the 'research approaches inherently reflect our beliefs about the world we live in and want to live in' (Lather, 1991:51). Powdermaker identifies counter-productive researcher traits,

including ‘a lack of theory or imagination, an over commitment to a particular hypothesis or a rigidity in personality (which) may prevent a field worker from learning as he stumbles’ (1966:11). According to Byrne and Lentin, feminist research methodologies evolved from a concern with social justice (particularly in relation to gender) and this concern has implications for ‘how we “do” research’ (2000:7). Dissatisfaction with existing methodological approaches fuelled the impetus to create a philosophical genre which would specifically address issues such as:

A deconstruction of power relationship between researcher and researched, a political commitment to the emancipation of women, and models of research and practice which privilege participation, representation, interpretation and reflexivity (Byrne and Lentin, 2000:4).

Ultimately ‘the way in which research is conducted suggests whether it is feminist work: It does *not* depict women as powerless, abnormal, or without agency. It reveals micropolitics of the research process’ (Olesen, 2007:421). According to Wincup, feminist researchers advocate ‘a less exploitative relationship based on informality, equality, reciprocity, empathy, rapport and subjectivity’ (2001:20). While the participants in this study are situated within a challenging context, they are powerful, reflective people who are proactive change agents.

The FER genre of research, according to Reinharz, relies on ‘the researcher’s immersion in the social setting, and aims for intersubjective understanding between researchers and the person(s) studied’ (1992:46). According to Etter-Lewis, the interviewee is in the position of ‘teacher’ as she interacts with the researcher who wants to learn about the interviewee’s world. This philosophy demands that ‘the interviewer must be a willing learner whose external knowledge (i.e., information outside of the narrator’s experience) guides (not dominates) the elicitation process’ (1996:127). Furthermore, Lather contends that the keystone of any research is the relationship between researcher and participants since it is ‘through dialogue and reflexivity, design, data and theory emerge, with data being recognised as generated from people in a relationship’ 1991:72).

This study does not address the issue of gender inequality directly. However, the issue is articulated through the acknowledgement of the lived experience of women, and the societal and social context in which this study is located.

In this thesis I draw on a range of methodologies from the qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. Byrne and Lentin argue that it is not specific methodologies which are feminist, rather it is the adaptation of principles which guide the study:

It is not the method ... which makes research methodologies feminist, but rather the commitment to several feminist principles ... with prime attention given to the researcher-researched relationship and to the deconstruction of power relationships in the research process (2000:8).

Power and disempowerment are underlying themes within the FER paradigm. According to Etter-Lewis, 'the interview process has often been acted out as an elaborate configuration of stances between two people in an asymmetrical relationship: the researcher, who is always in control, and the interviewee - the knower, but the one who is controlled' (1996:125). Power, and more appropriately, the abuse of power is interrogated through the analysis of relationships between the researcher and research participants with specific reference to the arena of interpretation and representation, both deemed fertile ground for alienation and exploitation (Lynch, 2000:80). Lentin and Byrne denounce 'academic elitism' which:

Implicitly tells research subjects, 'I know something you don't,' calling upon them to provide us with *their* experiences and life stories so that we, the researchers, can use their experiences to produce *our* analysis (2000:32).

Chase, a feminist researcher, sees women's experiences located in an unequal world, and uses her research skills to access that world. She sees her work 'guided by (her) desire to contribute to our understanding of how women make sense of their lives in an inequitable social world, and of how social change becomes possible' (1996:49). It is my ambition, that my work, guided by FER principles, will succeed in acknowledging the lived experiences of participants in this research study.

### **3.5.1 Guiding principles of Feminist Emancipatory Research (FER)**

The next section offers an overview of FER in which the guiding principles of this philosophy are described. It is not a definitive list of characteristics but rather a generic description of the principles which have guided this research process. In unison with Byrne and Lentin I am more concerned with defining what feminist research '*includes*' rather than what it '*is*', since there are many interpretations and definitions within this paradigm (Byrne and Lentin 2000:3).

### 3.5.1.1 Declared subjectivity

FER makes a number of demands on the researcher. According to Kohler Riessman ‘the construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who created it’ (1993:v). FER demands that the researcher ‘declare’ her position in relation to the study, by accounting ‘for herself and her motivation in carrying out a particular piece of research, placing herself reflexively within her research text’ (Byrne and Lentin, 2000:8). According to Reinharz, ‘understanding the self in fieldwork releases us from the epistemological tension between un reflexive positivism, on the one hand, and navel gazing, on the other’ (1997:18). Finally, Clandinin contends that the researcher enters ‘into the research process as a person with [his/her] own personal practical knowledge’ (1985:365). She defines this personal practical knowledge as ‘an emotional and moral knowledge [which] actively carries our being into interaction with classroom events’ (ibid:382). According to Clandinin personal practical knowledge is ‘intimately connected with the narrative of our lives’ (ibid 383).

I was conscious that in my role as researcher, I was assuming a ‘new identity’ with people with whom I had worked, taught, danced, laughed and cried. Chapter Nine, ‘Researcher as Participant’, contextualises my position in relation to this study. I firmly acknowledge that the growth and development of KCP, and my interaction with the school and community formed a very significant part of my life even prior to carrying out this study. I had been a pupil, teacher, and Principal in the school. I am founder and Director of KCP. Members of my family were involved as learners and volunteers. I had been made welcome in many homes. Parents, children and teachers in the ‘Three O’Clock School’ had visited my home, the adults had come for social evenings, and the SPACE project had run a sponsored walk to my home, which is located about six miles from the school. According to Clandinin and Connelly the ‘researchers’ personal, private and professional lives flow across the boundaries into the research site; likewise, though often not with the same intensity, participants’ lives flow the other way’ (2000:115). The boundaries between my work and my personal life had long been breached prior to this research study.

Initially I did not believe I could carry out this study, since I thought my close relationship to the site, participants, and subject of study, would deter me from completing it in a manner which would be acceptable within the academy. Adaptation

of FER philosophy gave me permission and offered a licence to carry out this study within specific guidelines.

Reinharz contends that the FER approach is in sharp contrast to mainstream research where ‘personal experience typically is irrelevant ... or thought to contaminate a project’s objectivity’ (1992: 258). Within feminist research, the involvement of the researcher ‘as a person’ is deemed to have a healing effect, in that it ‘repairs the project’s pseudo-subjectivity’ (ibid: 258). Edmondson, in ‘*Writing between Worlds*’, refers to Dorothy Smith, who insists that writing should include the author’s position in order that ‘no-one should forget the contextual nature of knowledge ... In short, feminist sociologists more often write *through* the author than *about* her’ (Edmondson, 2000:200).

Writing through the author involves embracing the emotional dimensions of the researcher. Indeed Harris and Huntington argue that ‘the process of acknowledging the emotional impact of events in our practice enables us to analyze reflexively the differences between the values and experiences of the self and the other’ (2001:131), ultimately leading to higher quality research. They identify a number of advantages to working in this reflexive mode. Firstly, ‘emotional work ... enables us to evaluate our practice in a far greater depth – tapping into levels of meaning that are not always apparent when we negate the importance of our emotional responses’ (ibid:131). They also contend that ‘emotions can act as “markers” – a way of reliving events when analysing our practice or response to research subjects’ (ibid:131). Furthermore, in terms of reanalysing field notes they contend that ‘tapping into the experiences at the level of emotions is a powerful tool for the analysis and subsequent reanalysis of fieldnotes’ (ibid:137).

FER expects the researcher to engage in self-evaluative and reflective practice at every stage of the study. This resonates strongly with my experience of researching, analysing, and writing this study. During the interview process I was acutely aware of the quality and nature of interaction between participants and myself. I ‘watched’ myself as I asked questions, responded to their answers, and in turn responded to their own questions. I acknowledged the memories, emotions, and challenges that the interview process was creating in me. In listening and re listening to the interviews I examined my motivation, appreciation, and understanding of the processes I was



actively engaged in. This study touched my heart and indeed Behar advocates that it is only worth doing research that breaks your heart (1996). Gilbert contends that qualitative research 'is experienced both intellectually and emotionally' (2001:9). According to Opie:

The researcher in the analysis and writing of her text, is engaged in a fluid process of identifying and questioning ideology (her own, not merely the other's), her location within the literature, the nature of her textual practice and the personal and political implications of methodology for the participants in the study (1992:57).

Indeed self-reflection was an integral part of this study from its inception. Throughout the process I was challenged to reflect on my beliefs, my ways of interacting, how 'learning' or knowledge was generated, and how I was acting within the process. This challenge took a number of forms. Firstly, the literature search to guide and inform this study led me into areas I had little previous experience of, such as the area of research methodologies. I found this personally challenging, engaging, and exciting. I had, from the outset been excited about going out into 'the field', but little believed that researching the methodological arena would prove to be stimulating and engaging. Secondly, when I did get out into the field, the nature and quality of interaction with participants led me to a deeper understanding of their experiences, a deeper understanding of the issues being researched, and a deeper understanding of myself not only as researcher in the field, but in terms of how these interviewees perceived me as a person who had worked in the area for over twenty years. The participants were instantly at ease and had no hesitation in answering questions, asking questions, or seeking clarification. These noble honest people pushed me to acknowledge my achievements as woman, teacher, mother, and researcher. Finally, my reflective processes were supported through a process of reflective engagement with supervisors, colleagues, family, and friends.

FER philosophy expects the researcher to reflect on her social position, specifically on how it differs from that of the study participants, and how that difference might impact on her perspective within the study (Reinharz and Chase, 2003:82). According to Reinharz and Chase the common denominator between feminist researchers is '... a commitment to reflecting on the complexities of their own and participants' social locations and subjectivities' (2003:84).

Research based on the feminist paradigm highlights the political nature of all stages of the research process, for example, Josselson problematises the tension between the researcher's 'responsibility to the dignity, privacy, and well-being of those who are studied' and 'the scholarly obligation to accuracy, authenticity, and interpretation' (2007:538). Specifically in relation to outcomes, this paradigm urges the continued involvement of the researcher so that the research outcomes may be acted upon (Daly, 2000:68). This factor resonates with my on-going involvement with the study site. I did not descend into the research site to gather data, exit, write a report and finalise a thesis. I was, and continue to be, part of the dynamic of the site. I continue to work as Director of KCP, visit homes, advocate, fundraise, and be involved in the school itself. A number of research participants died before this work reached its conclusion. I found myself listening to the recorded voices of deceased friends and participants. Just one week after completing an advanced draft of this chapter, I found myself delivering the eulogy for our beloved school caretaker, a woman of 96 years who had worked in the school for almost forty years, from the altar of the local church. As I gazed at her extended family, friends, and neighbours, I endeavoured to pay tribute to a woman who for almost forty years had made a substantial difference to the life of the school and the community. In the aftermath of her funeral, my script in which I struggled to thank her for her commitment, love, and care, was printed in the parish newsletter, framed in the school corridor, and given as a gift to her family. Indeed, I learned that through my ability to write and deliver her eulogy I was able to pay tribute to her work and life publicly and offer a gift to her family, and her community. My involvement in the research process, specifically, the privileged intimate time I spent with interview participants, deepened my appreciation of their lives. It enabled me to realise the impact KCP had on their lives, and indeed, on mine.

### **3.5.1.2 The reconstitution of power relationships in Feminist Emancipatory Research**

As researchers we need to be acutely aware of how the power dynamic is manifested through the quality of relationships within the research process. Starhawk defines three types of power, power-over, power-from-within, and finally, power with. Power-over comes from estrangement, power-from-within comes from 'our sense of connection, our bonding with other human beings, and with the environment' (Starhawk, 1987:10). Power with comes from our willingness to listen to each other and is based on respect (ibid:10).

FER is concerned with the deconstruction and redistribution of power within relationships. Indeed, according to Daly, ‘an important challenge that feminism has set itself is to create egalitarian relationships between the researcher and researched’ (2000:65). This philosophical approach proposes an alternative model of interaction, ‘with data recognised as generated from people in a relationship’ (Lather, 1991:72). As with all relationships, there is a natural tension, an ebb and flow in the researcher-participant relationship. It is not a static entity but a negotiated one, for which according to Clandinin and Connelly the researcher and participant must assume co-responsibility (2000:82). Clandinin and Connelly see the distance between researcher and participant as ‘elastic, sometimes close, other times more distant’ (ibid: 82). However, co-responsibility is only possible when research is conducted with an enlightened understanding of roles, and with a commitment to changing the status quo. In most cases participants and researchers are starting from an inherently unequal power base. The researcher comes to the field framed within a longstanding tradition of being viewed as an expert. The participant on the other hand comes having ‘experienced themselves as without a voice in the research process and may find it difficult to feel empowered to tell their stories (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:4). The feminist researcher, conscious of tradition, seeks to work in a counter cultural mode, which is empowering to all stakeholders. Indeed, according to Stuhlmiller, narrative research processes address this power imbalance since:

Narrative research involves getting a story from an individual who is identified as having some knowledge or experience with the topic of the study. Thus the narrator is immediately identified as having expertise. This places the narrator in a position of relative power because he or she knows more about something than the researcher (2001:67).

This counter-cultural mode resonates with Freire’s thesis of involving both the oppressed and oppressor in dialogue in order to co create a fairer world (1972:21). While feminist researchers traditionally place the responsibility of forging a more egalitarian relationship on the researcher, in contrast, Freire places the responsibility ‘to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well’ on the oppressed, since ‘the power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both’ (ibid:21).

Quinn Patton draws attention to the 'postcolonial and post modern world' where 'the relationship between the observed and the observer has been called into question at every level' (2002:84). Aull Davies addresses the issue of power relations, and concludes that 'differential power relations are commonly linked to social divisions such as class, gender, ethnicity, race, age or professional status, and will almost certainly affect the interview interaction' (1999:108). Hitchcock and Hughes address the gender issue in relation to interviewing, and stress that 'traditionally, interviewing has been condescending towards women because little account has been taken of gender differences' (1989:166). They contend that gender is an issue to the extent that 'when the respondent is a woman, added problems can occur especially as questions can ignore exploration of the more affective side of human interaction, i.e. personal feelings and emotions...' (ibid:166). Stanley and Wise advocate researchers to embrace the affective dimension of the research process, to be aware of the emotional impact on themselves and on their participants since this has the potential to inform insights and transform reality (1991:268). Rath contends that 'emotional involvement plays a crucial role in the engagement process of practitioners, and that this is centrally linked to narrative practice' (2002:153). FER forges a new definition of the most important aspect of the process, i.e. the relationship between researcher and participant, conceptualised by Reinharz and Chase as the desire to 'create non exploitative research relationships' (2003:81). This relationship is operationalised through 'horizontal relationships between persons' (Freire, 1974:40). This echoes Greene's 'seeing big' already discussed in Chapter Two, 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility'. Finally, Bondi problematises the relationship between feminist qualitative researchers and their participants and asks whether 'we can enter into and sustain ethically acceptable research relationships with others, or are we always at risk of exploiting or damaging either others or ourselves?' (2003:66).

The feminist model transforms the research relationship from that of unequal partners to one of partnership. In their analysis of 'current issues in feminist methodology', Cook and Fonow challenge 'the assumption that maintaining a strict separation between researcher and research subject produces more valid, objective research' (1986:9). Daly proposes a redefinition of this relationship from the traditional vertical, hierarchical mode where power is firmly located in the person of researcher, to one of partnership, where the researcher is himself/herself 'one participant among

many' (2000:65). Oakley advocates the necessity of personal involvement by the researcher as 'it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives' (1981:58). This very much echoes Friere's work where he describes dialogue as 'the encounter among men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world' (1972:61). He defines the five conditions necessary for true dialogue to take place, love, humility, faith in man, hope and critical thinking. Etter-Lewis acknowledges the powerful position of researcher, and cautions that researchers must:

...keep the narrative process human and preserve the personal dignity of narrators. Otherwise, we usurp the power of the interviewee's authority and what we have left is not collaboration but coercion (1996:119).

When this study began I had long standing, pre-existing, relationships with the people I interviewed. I had taught and worked with adults and children, gone on day trips and holidays, and ran KCP with the research participants. The interview process demanded that I declare my 'new role' as researcher. In fact, the process enlightened my understanding of my relationships with the participants. Again and again, they spoke of our pre-existing relationships, and the quality of their experiences as learners, and community leaders. FER principles relating to the deconstruction of power relations, were echoed in their prior experiences of pedagogy, dialogue, and interaction. The research process presented an opportunity to unravel the quality of relationships, and created a forum where both myself as researcher, and participants, could acknowledge and name the impact of these relationships and experiences on our lives. There was one participant, who gave an in depth interview and who later ceased to communicate with me, this material has not been used in the body of work. While the literature acknowledges the vulnerability of participants in relation to the power and privilege of the researcher, I realised that as researcher, I also placed myself in a 'vulnerable' situation. Since I could not check back with this participant I discounted the interview.

We have seen that 'power' is embedded within the research relationship. Power is also embedded within other aspects of the research process, including representation, dissemination, and ownership. Fine et al. highlighted their own experience in relation to the power dimension embedded in representation, when their participants recognised 'that (the researchers) could take their stories, their concerns and their

worries to audiences, policy makers, and the public in ways that they could not, because they would not be listened to' (2000:115). While the power dynamic is evidenced at all stages of the research process, the core site of power rests within the relationship between participants and researcher.

### **3.5.1.3 Participation**

FER proposes a dynamic approach which privileges participation. This ideology seeks to actively involve participants in 'naming their world' and to be active agents in critically analysing it. This is in contrast to positivist models, where 'there is no space in which to debate or frame radical structural critiques or alternative visions based on relational understanding' (Lynch, 2000:77). Participation is continuous throughout the entire research process.

Participants actively entered into the research dynamic, through a process of dialogue and analysis. In this study participation took formal and informal forms. Formally, participants attended for individual and focus group interviews. The focus groups functioned as a system of checking back with participants, as the focus group members had been previously interviewed individually and the focus group questions were informed by analysis of the individual interviews. Informally, I had many conversations with individuals and groups when I attended meetings, called into adult education classes, and met people in the street. In preparing the eulogy for our beloved caretaker, I spoke with teachers, tutors and adult learners who acknowledged their respect and love for her and her love for and influence on the school and on KCP. Opportunities for verification come in the most unexpected forms. I also gave a number of presentations to the adult education classes, and to the school staff, that included some of the interview participants as well as others who were not interviewed for this study

### **3.5.1.4 Negotiated interpretation: Co-creation of knowledge**

In FER the process of interpretation is viewed as a dynamic, interactive process, and is 'always the result of the interaction and reflections negotiated between researcher and researched through the research process' (Byrne and Lentin, 2000:36). According to Kohler Riessman, 'Interpretation is inevitable because narratives are

representations' (1993:2). Within this understanding participants actively engage in the process of interpretation and the construction of knowledge. The researcher acts as a conduit for data, and as an active participant in the process of interpretation. Interpretation is an integral part of an active interview. In this study focus groups were conducted after the individual interviews were analysed. Therefore, participants were involved as individuals, and as members of a group in the co-construction of knowledge. Informally I had many discussions with participants during and subsequent to the formal interview process. Oakley describes the transformation in the role of researcher from 'being a data collecting instrument for researchers, to being a data collecting instrument for those whose lives are being researched' (1981:49). In so doing Oakley exposes her underlying conviction that research is of value to the participants as well as the researcher, and furthermore, it has the potential to facilitate empowerment and transformation. Within this paradigm, both the researcher and the participants have a vested interest in the research process. In *'(Re) searching women'* Byrne and Lentin attest to this 'altered dynamic' between researcher and participants when interpretation is co-constructed (2000:36).

According to Daly, interpretation is safeguarded by the nature of the research process adapted by feminist researchers. She contends that knowledge is 'validated by all those involved in the research' (2000:65). The alternative where 'a scientific' conclusion has been reached by the researcher in isolation', is not tolerated within this paradigm (ibid:65). The power dynamic inherent in research, is no-where more evident than in the political agenda of researchers who claim to 'know and understand you better than you understand yourself' (Lynch, 2000:80). They interpret and represent you and 'speak on your behalf' (ibid: 80), without negotiation. FER embraces interpretation as a shared activity between the researcher and the participants. During the lifetime of this study, former 'Three O'Clock School' participants, active adult learners, committee members, and teachers made presentations to undergraduate and post graduate students in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, where I work. These sessions offered extended opportunities in which interpretation of research findings were confirmed, negotiated, and triangulated.

### 3.5.1.5 Representation

FER privileges representation. In representing the voice of participants the researcher acts as the conduit between the research participants and the outside world. Fine et al. council against 'othering', thereby 'feeding into the destructive politics of representation and becoming part of the negative figuration of poor women and men' (2000: 117). Field Belenky et al. caution that 'whenever people are cast as Other, they are largely unseen and unheard. The language used to describe them and their contribution is apt to be impoverished, inaccurate and demeaning' (1997: 293). Kohler Riessman differentiates between 'giving voice' and hearing and interpreting voice. She contends that we cannot 'give' voice but can hear, record, and interpret voice, all the time conscious of representational decisions (1993:8). Since 'investigators do not have direct access to another's experience' (ibid:8), Kohler Riessman, believes that 'all forms of representation are limited portraits' (ibid:15). The debate here is not specifically about the responsibilities and limitations of representation, but about the processes by which representation becomes an ethical consideration. Representation is preceded by dialogue, interpretation, and informed consent. Lynch advocates the formation of a research coalition, (2000:92) where representation is negotiated as part of the research process. This debate is also informed by Fine and Weis who, conscious of the politics of representation, 'try to work with communities and activists to figure out how to say what needs to be said without jeopardizing individuals or presenting a universal problem as if it were particular to this class' (1996:263). In this thesis, a written document, the culmination of many years of study, I present the voice and experiences of participants with their consent. However, when I am invited to give oral presentations, I consciously endeavour to bring some of the research participants with me. In that collaborative forum, the presentation is informed, validated, enlightened, and invigorated by their testimonies.

Feminist researchers claim that there have been incidences of 'middle class' researchers interpreting worlds which did more to enhance and progress the career of the privileged academic researcher, than to enhance the lives of the research participants. O'Neill's research was carried out within her native working class environment. She adapted FER as a conscious political response to the failure of the media and academics to deal effectively with the issue of poverty and



disempowerment in the 1980s. She has harsh criticism for the academics who ‘steal our stories, use our oppression to serve their own needs’ (2000: 105).

Working within this context demands an acute awareness of the power dynamic between researchers and participants. There is a strong ethical dimension to this work. The researcher must at all times be conscious of her position and responsibilities.

### **3.5.1.6 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is closely aligned to interpretation and representation. According to Hertz, ‘to be reflexive is to have ongoing conversations about experience while simultaneously living in the moment (1997:viii). Freire sees reflective practice as part of the human condition in which human beings ‘organise themselves, choose the best response, test themselves, act, and change in the very act of responding’ (1974: 3). Usher advocates active reflective practice, which ‘need not just be a ‘before’ or ‘after’ exercise but something that is on-going *during* the course of research’ (1996 39). Fonow and Cook define feminist reflexivity as the ability ‘to reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process’ (1991: 2). In acknowledging the responsibility to be reflexive, the researcher must facilitate an open, discursive, collaborative process which acknowledges difference. Byrne and Lentin advocate a ‘transparent research process’ with due attention to the ‘researcher’s own experience and involvement in research’ (2000:36).

Lynch decries the traditional power dynamic which privileges the position of the researcher above that of participants, challenging its very validity since ‘the perspective of the expert is only one viewpoint, and one which is generally one step removed from the oppression’ (2000:81). Her alternative is to; ‘create knowledge and understanding through partnership between the researcher and research subject, while recognising the differences between the two positions’ (ibid:81).

Byrne and Lentin challenge researchers to facilitate a shared construction of knowledge through dialogue and negotiation so that deeper meanings and understandings might emerge:

We must stress that a researcher's representation of the words of the researched, avowedly feminist as it might be, may not be recognised or agreed to by the researched and a balance between versions must somehow be struck, since the interpretations are always the result of interaction and reflections negotiated between researcher and researched through the research process (Byrne, Lentin. 2000:36).

To be reflexive is to pay attention to the quality of relationships. It is to treat participants with dignity and to have expectations that they are capable of both naming their own world, and becoming actors in transforming it. As Freire states, 'attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building' (1972:41).

FER demands that the researcher continuously reflect on his/her practice and pay attention to the quality of relationships within the research process. Fine et al. see reflective practice as an integral part of all stages of social research. They offer a checklist of questions designed to aid reflective practice. These questions offer a comprehensive framework to guide the researcher to interrogate their practice in terms of methodology, ethics, representation, cultural context, situating self, and audience (Fine et al., 2000:126-127).

Attention to reflexivity demanded engagement, not simply as an information gatherer, but as an active reflective agent. Olesen recognises the challenges associated with reflexivity and contends that researchers 'would do well to strive for it' (2007:425). Wincup contends that qualitative researchers have 'argued for the need for reflexivity to consider the role of values, social processes, and personal characteristics in shaping social research' (2001:18). Reflexivity demanded that I be conscious of 'cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of [my] perspective and voice and of those [I] interview[ed] ...' (Quinn Patton, 2003:65). Participants engaged with the interview process in a number of ways. They used the interview as an interactive forum to engage with their memories, emotions, and aspirations. They also used the interview as a medium through which they acknowledged the impact of KCP on the quality of their lives, and to acknowledge the personal relationships which existed between participants, and between individuals and myself. They saw the interview as an opportunity to 'give' something back to me, to offer me their time, wisdom, and the value of their experiences. One young man saw the interview as a process in

which ‘ all your [my] hard work is reflecting, thanking you for what you did’. In return, I acknowledged the importance of their contribution to the research process, the impact of KCP on my life, and the value of their relationships to me.

### **3.5.1.7 Epistemology**

Paying attention to feminist epistemology invites reflection about ‘how we know what we know’ and is part of the basis for developing principles guiding our research. Methodology is the medium through which we transform these principles into practice (Byrne, and Lentin, 2000:5).

Epistemology, defined by Fonow and Cook as ‘the study of assumptions about how to know the social and apprehend its meaning’ (1991: 1), is a central concern within FER. How knowledge is generated, who owns it, and fundamentally what indeed constitutes knowledge are all central to this discourse. According to Harvey and MacDonald ‘epistemology is concerned with what does and does not count as knowledge’ (1993:7). Palmer, concerned with the origins of knowledge, proposes two historical primary sources, i.e. curiosity and control. He contends that ‘curiosity is an amoral passion, a need to know that allows no guidance beyond the need itself’ (1983:8). Control, he contends ‘is simply another word for power, a passion notorious not only for its amorality but for its tendency towards corruption’ (ibid:8). Neither source is life enhancing. However, he proposes a third source ‘one that begins in a different passion and is drawn towards other ends’ (ibid:8). This knowledge originates in compassion and love, the goal of which is ‘the reunification and reconstruction of broken selves and worlds’ (ibid:8). Here the ‘act of knowing is an act of love’ (ibid:8). In a similar mindset, Kelly et al. politicize the creation of knowledge, drawing attention to the potential transformative impact. They contend that ‘our desire to do, and goal in doing, research is to create useful knowledge, knowledge which can be used by ourselves and others to ‘make a difference’’ (1994:28). In the same vein, Fine and Weis speak of working collaboratively to ‘figure out how best to collect data that will serve local struggles, rather than merely to document them’ (1996:270).

Ownership is manifested in the co-creation of knowledge as an act between equals albeit with different roles and responsibilities. Of course power and control are central to this debate. Lynch advocates co-creation as a means of power sharing and empowerment (2000:82). FER views the generation of knowledge as a political act.

Lynch advocates democratisation in the creation of knowledge since this 'knowledge is acted upon as the defining understanding of a situation' (2000:94). In this study the knowledge generated from individual interviews informed the development of focus group questions and feedback as well as flavouring on-going informal discussions with participants. In this way, knowledge was generated, shared and refined.

### **3.5.1.8 Transformative intent and outcome**

The transformative power of knowledge is emphasized in feminist methodology so that attention is paid to generating information that can be used to create alternatives to oppression (Fonow and Cook, 1986:24).

Daly strongly believes that sections of the Irish population have been 'over surveyed' and yet this has not led to a 're-appraisal of the power imbalance between the researcher and researched' (2000:69).

FER philosophy aspires to be transformative, which Maynard defines as being 'political [in] nature and [with] potential to bring about change' (1994:16). The potential to enact change lies in the person of the researcher, participants, and beyond. As participants have been involved in naming and interpreting their world, they are well placed to be part of its transformation. This aspiration echoes Freire's exploration of the effects of critical thinking processes on the individual who, through a process of reflection and dialogue, realises his ability to intervene in his world since 'a deepened consciousness of their situation leads men to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation' (1972:58).

Transformation is not only for the participants, but also for the researcher. According to O'Neill, the researcher, when working in partnership, has the opportunity not only to learn and to 'take from' the study but also to 'give something back'. The time I spent interviewing, gathering data, analysing and writing, informed my understanding of both the needs and outcomes implicit in the design and delivery of KCP. I had the privilege of listening to the telling and retelling of stories which acknowledged the transformational impact of KCP on women's, children's, and family lives. And in the listening, understanding, and writing, my life too was transformed, as I bore witness to transformation. As Miller concisely states, '... researchers are changed as well (1996:138). Research holds the promise of transformative outcome when the process

is conducted through dialogue, shared interpretation, and negotiation. Byrne and Lentin advocate reflective practice so that participation in the research process does not add further to the disempowerment of marginalised groups. They recommend that both, ‘the practice and consequences of research are scrutinised in terms of their beneficial or harmful outcomes for women as an oppressed group’ (Byrne and Lentin, 2000:8).

Feminists embrace the political nature of all stages of the research process. Specifically in relation to outcomes, this paradigm urges the continued involvement of researcher so that the research outcomes may be acted upon (Daly, 2000:68). Deyhle et al. contend that research participants bring expectations to the research process. Their thesis, in sharp contrast to traditional models, proposes transformative expectations, ‘... people being researched seek help from researchers in addressing specific social, political, and economic problems’ (Deyhle et al., 1992: 616). de Los Reyes and Gozemba acknowledge the transformative possibilities inherent in the research process with reference to Lather’s ‘catalytic validity’, explained by Lather as ‘the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it’ (de los Reyes and Gozemba, 2002: 18). This is echoed by Stuhlmiller who argues that ‘people understand themselves through telling and hearing stories’ (2001:64). Furthermore she contends that ‘people use narratives to explain the events that befall them. Stories create a sense of order out of chaos and give significance to an inexplicable event’ (ibid:65).

Feminist researchers believe the potential to ‘realise change’ (Lynch, 2000:95) lies dormant within the research process, and can be activated through attention to relationships, commitment, and empowerment. In the context of this study there were practical outcomes for some participants, who through the process of dialogue declared their aspirations to re enter formal education and made enquiries with institutions at the end of the interview process. Peshkin, reflecting on his role as researcher and possible change agent during the 1980s, problematised his role and struggled to understand how the researcher could remain objective and work with integrity while at the same time be part of a change process (1988: 20). Feminist researchers are open to being an integral part of the change process brought about through the creation of knowledge and the re imagining of reality. The research

process I engaged in for this work made me more acutely aware of the needs of learners, as they expressed their interest in different subject areas. This information led to exploring possible further learning opportunities for adults and children.

### **3.5.1.9 Language**

The ability to ‘translate’ ideas to an audience that varies in age, sex, ethnicity, and degree of literacy is a skill feminist educators need to develop’ (hooks, 1984:112).

Language can build bridges or dams. It can be inclusive or exclusive. Within the research process knowledge is generated and shared within the site of the study and across worlds. Edmondson tells us that it is not simply a matter of entering:

someone else’s world and removing from it representative terms used there to account for what people are up to, some way must be found to give this language meaning for the reader who has no access to that world except via text (Edmondson, 2000:190).

The researcher must therefore pay attention to the issue of accessibility through language, of giving enough detail and information to forge understanding between and within worlds. Lynch recognises the political dimension of language. Her thesis that the potential transformative impact of generated wisdom can be hampered by the use of inappropriate and alienating language is echoed throughout feminist literature:

No matter how radical the knowledge may be, its transformative potential is far from self-evident unless it is available and disseminated in accessible form to those about whom it is written or whose lives are affected by it (Lynch, 2000: 95).

During the research process I was very conscious of my own use of language. The language of academic text books would not resonate with, and in fact would alienate participants. The challenge was to use language familiar to participants which enabled communication. I am from the area, and therefore am very familiar with the nuances of local language. I am aware that when ‘experts’ use ‘fancy words’, they alienate, disrespect, and disempower people. However, much to my horror, on one occasion I asked a question in a way that was inaccessible to a participant. On realising my mistake I quickly apologised, rephrased it, and continued with the interview. Happily, this happened early in the process, and served as a valuable lesson for further engagements.

### 3.5.1.10 Researcher's voice

Traditionally, the passive voice predominates in academic writing. I have addressed this issue at length in Chapter nine, 'Researcher as Participant', claiming my voice and situating myself as researcher. According to Hertz, 'voice is a struggle to figure out how to present the author's self, while simultaneously writing the respondents' accounts and representing their selves (1997:xi). Clandinin and Connelly caution researchers to attend to power and representation issues relating to voice, since critics accuse narrative inquiry researchers of 'co-optation' of voice, arguing that 'voices are heard, stolen, and published as the researcher's own or that the researcher's voice drowns out the participants' voices, so that when participants do appear to speak it is, after all, nothing more than the researcher's voice code' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:75). Quinn Patton interrogates the conventional genre, proposing that this 'third person passive voice communicates a message' (2002:63) which privileges procedures above people, projects a sense of 'objectivity, control, and authority' (ibid:63) creating an overall impression which is 'mechanistic, robot-like, distant, detached, systematic and procedural' (ibid:63). Feminist researchers acknowledge this tension by sometimes writing in the first person and by acknowledging the 'self' they bring to the research process.

## 3.6 Case study design

This work takes the form of a case study, which according to Huberman and Miles, 'is a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context - a unit of analysis in effect' (1994:440). They define the boundaries as 'temporal, social, and/or physical'. Quinn Patton defines 'case studies as *'holistic and context sensitive'* (2002:447).

### 3.6.1 Defining a case study

The case study is a tool of feminist research that is used to document history and generate theory. It defies the social science convention of seeking generalizations by looking instead for specificity, exceptions, and completeness (Reinharz, 1992: 174).

This longitudinal case study spans a twenty-year period. Stories are not linear but rather they 'pulsate with movements back and forth through time and along a continuum of personal and social considerations' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:66).

The study is located within a DEIS primary school and the community which it serves. It specifically focuses on factors affecting the accessibility of learning for adults and children. Ultimately, it evaluates the effectiveness of KCP to address learning needs. This is achieved through the collection and analysis of a rich variety of data. According to Harvey and MacDonald, 'case study often involves interviews, observation and document analysis to collect detailed information on a particular case' (1993:224).

### **3.6.2 Case study methods**

This case study employed diverse methods of gathering and analysing data. Data sources include primary sources in the form of individual and focus group interviews, and secondary sources in the form of extensive print, audio, and visual documentary materials. Data analysis was on-going, and occurred before, during, and after data collection (Huberman and Miles, 1994:429).

### **3.6.3 Interviews**

According to Silverman 'deciding to do qualitative research is not an easy option' (2005:209). Fontana and Frey argue that 'asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at first' (1994:361). However, Seidman among others claims that 'as a method of inquiry, interviewing is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language' (1998: 7). Indeed, 'the use of narrative methodology results in unique and rich data that cannot be obtained from experiments, questionnaires, or observations' (Lieblich et al. 1998:9). Atkinson and Silverman advocate the use of interview methodology as it offers 'the opportunity for an authentic gaze into the soul of another' and also offers the opportunity for 'politically correct dialogue where researcher and researched offer mutual understanding and support' (1997:305). Mishler sees interviewing in terms of the 'joint product of what interviewees and interviewers talk about together and how they talk to each other' (1986:vii).

There are many considerations and challenges in employing this methodology. Fundamentally, the researcher is totally dependent on 'the knowledge and commitment of his or her key informants' (Fine and Deegan: 1996:440) and must



identify, select, and gain agreement for participation. According to Kohler-Riessman, the researcher must ‘encourage those we study to attend to and tell about important moments in their lives’, and this is facilitated by creating a ‘facilitating context in the research interview’ (1993:54). Ultimately as researchers ‘we listen people into speech’ (Josselson, 2007:547) as we intrude’ on people in the course of living real lives’ and ask ‘them to help us learn something’ (ibid: 538). On balance, interviewing offers a direct route, and brings us ‘closer to the experiences of people we study’ (Ochberg, 1996:97). Crucially, interviewing offers an interactive environment, in which to engage in the iterative process of storying, restorying, questioning, interpreting, and understanding. It is also a ‘natural’ methodology which resonates with this study in many ways. Story telling and dialogue have been integral parts of KCP since its conception. Indeed KCP evolved as a result of a dialogical process. According to Atkinson, ‘we are a story telling species. Story telling is in our blood. We think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story’ (2007:224).

Focus groups enriched the research process in a number of ways. Firstly, it allowed triangulation of findings since all focus group participants had been interviewed separately. Secondly, the focus groups provided an atmosphere of ‘relative safety, and trust’ in which ‘a far more textured and less judgemental sense of self is displayed’ (Fine and Weis, 1996: 267).

It is precisely because, ‘stories are a way of knowing’ (Seidman, 1998: 1) that close attention must be paid to methodological considerations, participant selection and the creation of a safe, nurturing, facilitative environment in which stories can be told. There is also something intensely personal and powerful in spending quality time listening to participants, specifically women, since many of our stories have gone unrecorded and our wisdom unharnessed, due to traditional, political, religious and societal barriers (Reinharz and Chase, 2003:28). In the process of researching this study I conducted extensive interviews with a wide variety of participants, who are profiled in Chapter Four ‘Data Sources and Collections Process’. I chose this methodology for a number of reasons. Firstly, for the duration of KCP I have been involved in dialogue with participants about their lives, KCP, their community, and their families. The participants and I had what Holstein and Gubrium value as ‘shared experiences’ (1995:45). The interview process allows this shared experience to be

used as ‘a resource by interviewers and respondents’ (ibid:45). In choosing to interview participants I was formalising and building on pre-existing relationships with participants. According to Holstein and Gubrium, this background knowledge enriches the process and the findings:

By drawing on background knowledge, active interviewers can make their research more productive, incorporating indigenous interpretative resources, perspectives, and landmarks into their inquiries (1995:45).

Interviewing was a natural and accessible medium through which I gained ‘access to other people’s perceptions, including crucially the thoughts, attitudes and opinions that lie behind their behaviour’ (Altrichter et al., 1993:101). Secondly, as Ochberg cited above states, interviewing is a formula to bring the researcher ‘closer to the experiences of the people we study’. The interview process brought me closer to people, in that it afforded dedicated time to listen, observe, and explore issues with them. It also prompted participants to ‘revisit’ their experiences, and reflect on their experiences in a profound way.

At the end of one interview a former ‘Three O’Clock School’ participant pondered his image of himself as a child. The ‘Three O’Clock School’ is an after school programme designed to offer children social, academic, and creative learning opportunities and is profiled in detail in Chapter Four, ‘Data Sources and Collection Process’. The following short extract captures a profound and emotional moment, as this young man revisioned his childhood in the light of the preceding conversation.

Interviewee- It’s nice to look back and reflect on things isn't it? They are all good memories. I wasn't a messer at all was I?  
Interviewer- No you were wonderful, and you are wonderful.  
Interviewee- Ann you are wonderful yourself. Thanks Ann right

The immediate purpose of the interviews was to gather data. This data served to inform this study and offered a basis for discussions on future directions for KCP. Seidman contends that the interview ‘affirms the importance of the individual (Seidman, 1998:7). Furthermore, according to Miller the interview serves a personal need for the interviewee; ‘it is the opportunity to be listened to and to communicate that people want and seem to need’ (1996:132). This was borne out in many of the interviews as participants reflected on the interview, and related how they ‘enjoyed’ the opportunity to have conversations about their prior experiences during the

interview process. The following extract from an interview with a young man, a former 'Three O'Clock School' participant, demonstrates the mixed emotions and impact of the interview process on the participant:

I'm still pure nervous talking here. My grammar is all twisted and all. I don't usually talk .... cos you are bringing me back the memories I thought I'd never talk about again, so I feel like ... I am happy about it ... This is another experience, this interview ... I'm actually happy I spoke with you about it ... Ann you are more than a teacher you are a friend to me (Former 'Three O'Clock School' participant no. 4).

Some of these interviews were intensive, emotional, and very revealing. Participants spoke of their life circumstances and were chillingly honest in their depictions of their lives. The SPACE project was an initiative within KCP. It was set up to offer space to young women who were mothers to reflect on their lives, learn skills and enjoy each other's company. At the end of one very emotional interview with a former SPACE participant I checked that she was feeling alright and comfortable with the interview process. Her response, captured below, portrays how the interview process itself can provide a therapeutic forum in which the participant has a safe space to express their feelings:

I am grand about it. It gave me a chance to express myself, and maybe I have I have had this bottled up. But it is nice to talk to somebody else who is actually going to write about it. And maybe it might give somebody some bit of encouragement to see what I went through and what I achieved at the end of it.

Clandinin and Connelly observe how an interview can turn into a 'form of conversation' when an intimate participatory relationship exists between the researcher and participants (2000:110). Interview sessions extended well beyond information gathering fora. There was on-going analysis as issues were raised, discussed, and revisited, an iterative process recognised by Hitchcock and Hughes:

...data analysis is not altogether a separate process in qualitative research. Since the researcher is the funnel through which the data are received, some form of analysis will take place simultaneously with data collection (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989:296).

This iterative, reflective, interpretive process matched the natural dynamic of my study. Attention to the interview process, questions, relationships, and location maximised collaboration and honest interchange of information. Furthermore, the interview process facilitated participants to ask me questions about the project, my

family, my studies, and my reaction to the information they were sharing with me. In this way ‘both participants – teller and listener/questioner- develop(ed) meaning together’ (Kohler Riessman, 1993:55).

Interview methodologies were the natural and most effective means of meeting the demands of this study. Interviews facilitated in-situ analysis. The simultaneous gathering and analysis of data permitted me to get to ‘know points of view, interpretations and meanings in order to gain greater understanding of a situation’ (Altrichter et al., 1993:101). FER principles, applied to the interview methodology enabled fruitful, insightful, and challenging interaction. It facilitated rich gathering of data, which consciously occurred within an understanding of ‘ethical and process issues’ (Chase, 1996:45). Etter-Lewis rationalised the challenges of doing interview-based research on both theoretical, and practical levels (1996:115). The issues of researcher bias and subjectivity, (theoretical level) along with concern about interviewee bias, and reliability of memory (practical level) must all be considered when using interview methodologies. These concerns were addressed through reflective practice, triangulation, multi method methodologies, and attention to these issues prior to going into the study site.

#### **3.6.4 Interview process operationalised**

Charmaz describes interviewing as ‘a flexible, emergent technique; ideas and issues emerge during the interviews, and the interviewer can then immediately pursue these leads’ (2003:312). For example, I could not have predicted how strongly the theme of personal safety would arise during interviews. Kelly et al. see interviews as ‘the route through which inter-subjectivity and non hierarchical relationships between women researchers and women participants can be developed’ (1994:34). In the context of this study the interview process cemented and acknowledged existing relationships. As Josselson succinctly states, ‘all interviews are interventions’ (2007:546).

Each interview began by thanking the participants for their time, confirming that their individual identity would be protected, explaining the reason for the interview and how the data would be used. The interviews were semi-structured in that I had questions prepared, but I was also vigilant for emerging issues.

Individual interviews lasted approximately one hour. At the end of the interview I thanked individuals for participating. The interviews sometimes closed with reflection on the research process. The participants were conscious that the interview process had awoken memories which they had not visited for a long time. This was especially true for participants who had been children in the 'Three O'Clock School', and for former members of the SPACE project. I felt it was very important to make sure the memories and emotions of the participants were acknowledged and that people did not leave the interview in a vulnerable state. According to Fonow and Cook a 'major feature of feminist epistemology is its refusal to ignore the emotional dimension of the conduct of inquiry' (1991:9). On more than one occasion, I was moved to tears by the honest and in-depth insights of the participants as they engaged with me in the interview process. I found that as well as 'minding' the participants, and ensuring they left the interview at peace with the process I also realised I needed to acknowledge the emotional impact on myself. Kelly et al. advocate inviting feedback from research participants on the research process (1994:36) Certainly, reflexivity formed part of the closure in this study. During my years working in the school and in KCP I had gained some insight into the impact of KCP on the quality of people's lives and relationships. However, I was not prepared for the intensity of feeling and depth of impact on their lives which the participants shared during the interview process.

At individual interview stage I established participants' willingness to take part in focus group research. While all participants indicated their willingness to take part in the focus groups, not all were available when the focus groups were conducted. The focus groups took place after initial analysis of individual interviews was completed. Focus group questions were informed by the analysis of individual interviews. Therefore the focus group methodology afforded the facility to check back with participants. This offered a form of respondent validation (Silverman, 1993:233) and triangulation to ensure I had interpreted the data correctly.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

I came to this study as an insider. My personal experiences over time with KCP informed the analysis of data. Dey recognises, 'accumulated knowledge', (1993:63) as a resource. My insider 'accumulated' knowledge informed the analytic process

through on-going reflective practice and involvement, not only through the medium of this study, but also through my on-going engagement with KCP, the school, and the community. Dey contends that ‘The issue is not whether to use existing knowledge, but how’ (1993:63).

Data collected for this study rests within a cache of rich accumulated knowledge. Clandinin and Connelly acknowledge this phenomenon by conceptualising our lives as storied and restoried lives (2000:132). As researcher, I bring an emic perspective of the culture and language of participants. While my experience as the project instigator was unique in itself, I also shared many of the experiences of respondents. For example, I attended as an adult learner in the cookery and hairdressing classes at the early stages of the project. I also went on holidays and day trips:

Confronted with a mountain of impressions, documents, and field notes, the qualitative researcher faces the difficult and challenging task of making sense of what has been learned. I call making sense of what has been learned *the art of interpretation* (Denzin, 1994:500).

According to Denzin the researcher faces the challenge of ‘making sense’ of the data. The researcher is charged with interpreting and ultimately communicating findings to their audience. The volume of data collected for this study is described in Chapter Four, ‘Data Sources and Collection Process’. This section profiles the processes involved in order to ‘make sense’ of this data, what Quinn Patton describes as the challenge to ‘*creatively synthesise and present findings*’ (2002:58). Quinn Patton proposes that analysis at the most basic level of understanding, ‘transforms data into findings’ (ibid:432). According to Altricher et al., ‘human beings look for meaning’ (1993:119), and the quest for understanding and knowledge drives the process of analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, Pole and Lampard contend that ‘the purpose of qualitative data analysis is to construct a conceptual framework by which the researcher can make sense of the social world he/she is studying’ (2002:204).

Qualitative analysis makes specific demands on the researcher. Robson advises that ‘the central requirement in qualitative analysis is clear thinking on the part of the analyst’ (1993:374). Strauss and Corbin with specific reference to grounded theory, a specific approach to qualitative analysis, define the requisite skills of the researcher: In summary the analyst needs to have:

- The ability to step back and critically analyse situations;
  - The ability to recognize the tendency towards bias;
  - The ability to think abstractly;
  - The ability to be flexible and open to helpful criticism;
  - Sensitivity to the words and actions of respondents;
  - A sense of absorption and devotion to the work process.
- (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:7)

With reference to the acknowledged fathers of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss, Quinn Patton emphasises the need for the researcher to become ‘immersed in the data ... so that embedded meanings and relationships can emerge (2002:454). Pole and Lampard advocate ‘an intimate relationship between the researcher and the data’ (2002:206).

This study aims to generate grounded theory based on systematic and transparent analytic procedures. Glaser and Strauss define grounded theory methodology (GTM) as ‘the discovery of theory from data’ (1967:1). Glaser and Strauss sought to provide ‘an inductive approach to collecting and analysing qualitative data that seriously attempted to be faithful to the understandings, interpretations, intentions and perspectives of the people studied’ (Clarke, 2005:3). I believe that feminist emancipatory research principles and grounded theory are compatible since they both seek to construct knowledge by paying due attention to process as well as outcomes. Indeed Olesen contends that the two disciplines have much to offer each other since ‘grounded theorists have much to learn from reflexive feminist research accounts’ and ‘feminists have much to learn from newer formulations of grounded theory’ (2007:428).

There are well-defined stages in the development of grounded theory where ‘the emphasis is upon the researchers to interrogate the data to the point of saturation in their efforts to discover theory’ (Pole and Lampard, 2002:200). The initial stage of open coding involves ‘the development and labelling of concepts in the text that the researcher considers of potential relevance to the problem being studied’ (Pidgeon and Henwood, 2004:636). This is in fact interpretive coding, where the researcher moves into a level of abstraction. This labelling then enables ‘constant comparison’, facilitating the exploration of similarities and differences in the data. This methodology, along with theoretical sampling which is defined as ‘the collection of new data as the analysis proceeds, in order to elaborate and build up emerging

insights and theory' (ibid:634), constitute the 'foundation upon which grounded theory is built' (ibid:637).

There are a number of variations within the field of grounded theory, and Charmaz argues that 'the strength of grounded theory methods lies in their flexibility and one must engage the method to make this flexibility real' (2006:178). Dey proposes that '... there is not such thing as "grounded theory" if we mean by that a single, unified methodology, tightly defined and clearly specified' (2004:80) Rather, he proposes that we have 'different interpretations of grounded theory' (ibid:80). According to Charmaz, grounded theory has 'been packed with multiple meanings, but also fraught by numerous misunderstandings and complicated by competing versions' (2006:177). However, Charmaz proposes that all variants have the following characteristics in common:

- Simultaneous data collection and analysis;
  - Pursuit of emerging themes through early data analysis;
  - Discovery of basic social processes within the data;
  - Inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesize these processes;
  - Sampling to refine the categories through comparative processes;
  - Integration of categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions, and consequences of studied processes.
- (2003:313).

Furthermore, Charmaz proposes that two distinctive forms of grounded theory have arisen within the field, constructivist and objectivist. The objectivist view of grounded theory 'emphasises the viewing of data as real in and of themselves. This position assumes that data represent objective facts about a knowable world' (2003:313). The constructivist approach in contrast sees 'data and analysis as created from the shared experiences of researcher and participants' the methods used function to provide 'tools for learning' (ibid:313). I embrace the constructivist approach that I will outline in detail later in this chapter.

Mruck and Mey also recognise the multiple forms of GTM and urge researchers to 'make transparent which of the 'multiple GTMs' they might deploy, to justify choice, and to specify their conceptions and uses if they are to ensure that other researchers have at least a chance to understand their procedures and results' (2007:516). Clarke recognises the 'range of stances *within* grounded theory', and acknowledges Clarke



and Locke's argument that 'most recent work is shifting towards more constructivist assumptions/epistemologies' (2005:2).

Pole and Lampard propose three discrete stages of analysis. Firstly, *preliminary analysis*, relating to the study design and pre field work stage. Secondly, *processual analysis*, relating to the 'continued engagement with the data as it is collected' (Pole and Lampard, (2002:190). This informs the collection of further data and shapes the direction of the research (ibid:190). And finally, *summative analysis*, the stage at which conclusions are drawn from the research. This final stage is dependent on successful preliminary and processual analysis (ibid:191).

With reference to Pole and Lampard's framework I will now describe the research stages of this project. The preliminary stage of this study involved both personal and technical decisions. On a personal level, firstly I had to understand why I wanted to do this study, how I wanted to do it, and, more importantly, I needed to learn how to locate myself within it. The reasons I decided to do this study were two-fold. Firstly, I wanted to learn the craft of research. Secondly, I wanted to hear the voices of research participants and tell their stories. On a technical and design level I had to decide, how many, and who to interview, how to record the interviews, how to validate my findings, and where best to locate interviews. In my capacity as co-ordinator of the Targeting Educational Disadvantage Project (TED) in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick I was involved in a number of research projects, and working as part of a research team informed and supported my study.

Within this study, the second stage, processual analysis, involved the on-going analysis and review of data prior to, during, and after each interview. Silverman advocates simultaneous data collection and analysis as good practice within this field (2005:149). Simultaneous data collection and analysis were conceptualised by Pole and Lampard as 'an integral aspect of the research process' (2002:209) which fosters on-going reflective practice. Quinn Patton observes that 'in the course of fieldwork, ideas about directions for analysis will occur' (2002: 436). Processual analysis is a dynamic and reflective phase where the researcher actively engages in analysis while constantly reviewing the data in terms of process and content.

There were several stages in the analysis of primary data in this study. During phase 1 focus group and individual interviews were recorded and notes taken during each interview session. Furthermore, field notes recorded interview location, duration, and observations before, during, and after the interview process. These field texts functioned to inform analysis. Quinn Patton notes the importance of the post interview stage, stating that it is a ‘critical time of reflection and elaboration. It is a time of quality control to guarantee that the data obtained will be useful, reliable, and authentic’ (2002:384).

Phase 2 involved the first step in the analysis of formal data and occurred directly after each interview. I listened to the recordings and filled in the gaps in my written notes. I then listened to the interviews for a second time and began the process of coding the data. Through a process of inductive analysis, defined by Quinn Patton as ‘discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data’ (2002:453), themes begin to emerge. No researcher or analyst approaches their task from a neutral position. While themes emerge through a process of analysis, it is also true that researchers bring their own sensitivity, unique insights, and prior experiences which inform their work.

As I analysed the data, I searched for weaknesses and strengths and emerging directions in the research process. This process included a review of interview questions in terms of content, sequence, language, and phraseology. Furthermore, I reflected on suitability of location, and effectiveness of the interview process. According to Charmaz, this active review and reflection has two outcomes. It keeps ‘researchers close to their gathered data’ and gives researchers ‘tools for analysing data as well as for obtaining additional focused data that inform, extend, and refine emerging analytic themes’ (2003:312). Quinn Patton places reflexivity at the core of qualitative research where the researcher must be ‘self-questioning and self-understanding’ (2002:64), throughout the on-going process of data gathering and analysis. During this phase I made notes, and identified emerging themes, described in the literature as ‘writing theoretical memoranda to explore emerging concepts and links to existing theory’ (Pidgeon and Henwood, 2004:629). To build familiarity with the data, I listened to the recordings regularly, often at home or in the car while travelling, and in this way over time, I built deeper and deeper layers of understanding. This familiarity with data is pertinent to what Janesick describes as

inductive analysis ‘which means that categories, themes, and patterns come from the data. The categories that emerge from field notes, documents, and interviews are not imposed prior to data collection’ (Janesick, 1994:215).

In phase 3, the second stage of primary data analysis builds on the system of coding previously described and involved the use of Annotape, a software package which facilitates coding of audio data. During this stage interviews were analysed and annotated electronically. While this two-phase primary analysis was time consuming, it ensured in-depth familiarity with the data. During the active interviewing stage I analysed and coded the data on paper after each interview. The sequence of interviews was based on availability of participants. When all interviews were complete and analysed on paper, I then analysed them electronically using Annotape. At this point interviews were analysed by sub categories, (e.g. all teachers in sequence, all young adult learners in sequence). This facilitated an insight not only into individual data, but also into category specific data. Furthermore, focus groups were made up of single category participants which afforded an insight into how specific groups within the research viewed specific issues, and also afforded an opportunity for triangulation and participant validation (Silverman, 2005:212).

Table 3.1 summarises the application of Pole and Lampard’s framework to this study.

**Table 3.1: Stages of Analysis**

Preliminary analysis	Processual analysis	Summative analysis
Personal decision to undertake study Development of skills through literature review and dialogue	Phase 1 Contact participants Set up interview time and location Conduct interviews Record interviews both manually and electronically On-going analysis during interview process	Phase 1: Write up phase Discussed drafts with participants, colleagues and supervisors
Initial exploration of possible topics	Phase 2; Post interview –listened to recording and filled in gaps in written notes Re listened to interviews, and began coding data cognisant of emerging themes. Reviewed interview process/timing/quality of questions/language Re-listened to interviews	Phase 2: Made presentations to interviewees and members of KCP who did not participate in the research. Made presentations to wider educational community in Limerick City.
Realisation that I could undertake this study given my relationship to site	Phase 3 Used Annotape, a software package to electronically code data Themes firmly established Themes explored	Phase 3: Incorporated responses to research findings in final draft.
Identification of participants		

Silverman contends that computer aided analysis ‘supports the code and retrieve operations of grounded theorising’ (2005:197). This software ‘facilitates working with large amounts of narrative data’ (Quinn Patton, 2002:57). It is but a tool in the management of data. It does not analyse the data nor indeed generate theory.

Silverman differentiates between these two distinct processes of data management and theory building stating that, ‘theory building is generally done in the mind, or

with the aid of paper...’ (2005:202). Ultimately, analysis is beyond management of data and counting of data. Analysis is a cognitive process, which involves ‘creativity, intellectual discipline, analytical rigor, and a great deal of hard work’ (Quinn Patton, 2002:442).

The third and final phase of Pole and Lampard’s framework, summative analysis, is the stage at which conclusions are drawn from the research, enabling ‘the researcher to make sense of the collected data and to advance explanations and understandings of the social phenomena to which they relate’ (2002:192). According to Charmaz the methods involved in generating grounded theory:

... consist of flexible strategies for focusing and expediting qualitative data collection and analysis. These methods provide a set of inductive steps that successively lead the researcher from studying concrete realities to rendering a conceptual understanding of them (2003: 311).

Grounded theory methodologies are not without their critics. In their summary of critiques of grounded theory methodologies Thomas and James identify a number of areas of concern. Firstly, they identify the oversimplification of ‘complex meanings and inter-relationships in data’ (2006:768). Secondly, they find that analysis is constrained since procedures precede interpretation. Finally, they posit that grounded theory depends on ‘inappropriate models of induction’ (ibid:768). The issues raised are indeed worthy of consideration and reflection. However, I believe that constructivist grounded theory methodology as outlined by Charmaz, as interpreted for this study, is appropriate to this work since by its very nature it is flexible and ‘celebrates firsthand knowledge of empirical worlds ... assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects’ meaning (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994) (Charmaz, 2000:510). Indeed Charmaz advocates a reclamation of these ‘tools from their positivist underpinnings to form a revised, more open-ended practice of grounded theory that stresses its emergent, constructivist elements’ (ibid:510). She advocates an approach in which ‘grounded theory strategies need not be rigid or prescriptive’ and in which ‘the focus on meaning ... *further*s, rather than limits, interpretive understanding’ (ibid 510).

This study is concerned with generating knowledge, gleaned from the experiences and wisdom of the research participants. It is through the conceptual understanding, manifested through the theories and insights extracted from the research process, that this work can both acknowledge the contribution of participants and contribute to the development of knowledge in this area. According to Quinn Patton, 'grounded theory depends on methods that take the researcher into and close to the real world so that the results and findings are grounded in the empirical world' (2002:125). These results and findings must be mediated through the researcher engaging sympathetically and sensitively with participants, so that their experiences are valued, validated, and understood.

### **3.8 Location**

Interviews were conducted in four locations, the school, participant's homes, a nursing home, and a place of work. Location of interviews is an important consideration since, 'naturalistic inquiry preserves natural context' (Quinn Patton, 2002:62). When participants agreed to be interviewed they were asked to choose their preferred location for interview. Sometimes it suited to hold the interviews in the school, since participants might be dropping off or collecting children or they themselves might be attending classes. In the school interviews took place in the kitchen, a classroom, or the principal's office depending on what space was available at the time. All participants were familiar with the school and comfortable with whatever room was available. However, sometimes it was more convenient to hold interviews in participants' homes if they were minding young children or grandchildren. I had previously visited participants' homes and they were very comfortable with my presence. I was frequently offered tea, shown family photographs, and enquiries made about my own family members. Ellis and Berger contrast the traditional researcher-participant relationship, described as 'the orthodox model of distance and separation' (2003:469) with the interactive form where 'researcher involvement can help subjects feel more comfortable sharing information and close the hierarchical gap between researchers and respondents that traditional interviewing encourages, thus promoting dialogue rather than interrogation' (ibid:469). Cook and Fonow support this interactive approach where participants 'talk back' to the researcher, thus radically changing the relationship between stakeholders (1986:9).

Interviews had an interactive format, with easy natural dialogue. Some participants told me they shared information because it was me they were speaking to, and would not be so forthcoming with an outside researcher. The research participants afforded me privileges of access to their homes, and to information specifically linked to my long-term involvement with KCP and the school and to pre existing relationships.

Some of the former 'Three O'Clock School' participants had not been in the school building for a number of years and locating the interviews in the school aided recollection. The initial stage of the interview was sometimes spent with them reminiscing about their time in the school, or their involvement with KCP, walking down the corridor to find their First Communion photographs hanging on the wall, and looking around the building noticing changes and developments. This was very obviously a positive experience for them and helped to set the scene for the subsequent interview. On one evening I held an interview with a former SPACE participant who was also an active adult learner, and we were the only people in the school building that evening. As we went into the kitchen she immediately turned to me and asked if I would like a cup of tea, in a welcoming tone, as if I had just entered her home. I realised at that point how much she was at ease and felt ownership of that environment.

### **3.9 Access to participants**

Due to my long term and on-going involvement with the school and KCP I had easy access to potential research participants. I know all of the research participants as I had worked directly or indirectly with them either in KCP or as a teacher in the school. I did not need to negotiate access to the study site, nor indeed, to establish credibility or trust. However, I did need to define the purpose of the interview, and my role as researcher. When I approached potential research participants to ask if they were willing to be interviewed I explained the purpose of the study. Later when the interview was taking place I again reminded them of the purpose of the interview and overall study.

Serendipity also played a part. Fine and Deegan propose a framework for interpreting serendipity which include temporal, relations and analytic components (Fine and Deegan, 1996). In this case the temporal component came into play. Gergen and

Gergen advocate a creative openness to research processes in which the researcher is advised to avoid ‘impulses towards elimination, the rage of order, and the desire for unity and singularity’ (2000:1042). They contend that the researcher is rewarded by the ‘continuing flourishing of qualitative inquiry, full of serendipitous incidents and generative explanations’ (ibid:1043). One former participant, who had been a very active young adult learner and mother involved with the ‘Three O’Clock School’ with her children, had emigrated about five years prior to this study. I met her by chance one evening when I was in the area and arranged an interview for the following day. The interview took place in her mother’s home. Her mother had been a former participant in the adult education classes and I conducted an interview with her also. Sometimes access needed to be negotiated if participants had moved to other parts of the city, or if they were not involved with KCP at the time of research. All participants were willing to be interviewed apart from one person, who while very happy to be part of the research process felt she was ‘not a good speaker’ and would prefer to give a written response to questions. This she did, and I used her written report as a basis to enter into unrecorded dialogue with her to clarify her data.

### **3.10 Chapter conclusion**

As I progressed through the research process I began to realise that a number of changes to my original plan were necessary. Firstly, the size of study needed to be increased. The analysis of initial primary data forced a revision of the size and depth of the study. It quickly became evident that it would be necessary to interview a cross section of participants involved in various aspects of the life of the school and KCP in order to effectively answer the research question. A total of fifty individual interviews and six focus groups were conducted. Secondly, while my initial focus was very much on the evolution and impact of KCP, I realised it was neither possible nor prudent to study KCP as a discrete entity, since the school and KCP had an interdependent holistic relationship. According to Quinn Patton an holistic approach ‘assumes that the whole is understood as a complex system that is greater than the sum of its parts’ (2002:59). This phenomenon, the gestalt, recognises the ‘totality or unifying nature of particular settings’ (ibid:59). This phenomenon is part of the uniqueness of the study and offered rich and unique research material. The analysis of data indicated that the merging of boundaries between different services offered



within the school was one of the contributory factors in 'making the KCP work' and in enriching the life of the school.

I realised the research process was having a personal impact. I was learning about myself both by reflecting on 'how I was' during the research process, and through the interview data in which participants referred to my role as teacher, tutor, committee member, and founder of KCP. Reinharz suggests that within a study learning takes place on three fronts, on 'the level of the person, the problem, and method' (1992:194). She contends that the researcher learns about herself, about the subject of the study, and about how to conduct research. Finally, the study was going to take a lot longer than I originally anticipated.

There were a number of direct outcomes as a consequence of the revised research plan. Firstly, the nature of the study and the number of participants interviewed meant that two and sometimes three generations of the same family were interviewed. This afforded an insight not only into the outcomes of involvement in KCP for the individual, but also from a family perspective. The number of participants also aided triangulation as data was analysed across sectors of participants. Secondly, as the research spanned a twenty year period from 1995 to 2005, this afforded an insight into both the immediate and long-term impact of KCP. Some participants such as the former 'Three O'Clock School' and SPACE project participants were no longer actively involved within those strands of the project. They profiled the impact of KCP in terms of the impact at the time of involvement, for example, the 'Three O'Clock School' and what it meant to them as children, and also the long term impact which has influenced their adult lives. Others, such as the mature adult learners who are actively involved, reflected on both the long term and immediate impact. But some participants, notably some of the young adult learners, had relatively short-term involvement and they reflected on the immediate impact on their lives. Participants reflected not only on the personal impact but also on the impact of KCP on the school and community over time.

Participants were very comfortable during the interview process whether it was located in the school or in their homes. I was welcomed into homes, as I had been in all homes prior to carrying out this study. Participants were at ease with the process, and with their surroundings, and were 'ready and willing' to share their experiences.

Fontana and Frey acknowledge the importance of atmosphere or ambiance which surrounds the interview. They contend that ‘...non verbal communication both informs and sets the tone for the interview’ (Fontana and Frey, 1994:371).

Communication was open and easy, participants were eager to participate and engage in the interactive process, where both researcher and participants related in a meaningful way. I acknowledged their willingness to give me their time and share their wisdom. Because of my familiarity with participants I was conscious of the dilemma whereby they might feel the need to please me with their answers, or say what they thought I expected to hear. I believe this predicament was averted by checking for consistency in answers, by asking the same questions in different ways at different stages of the interview, by triangulation across sectors of interviewees, by focus group validation, participant validation, and by my own prior knowledge and on-going involvement with the project. Furthermore, the nature of my relationship with participants has been open and communicative over a long period of time. During the interview process interviewees sometimes turned the tables and asked how the project had affected my life. Furthermore, they asked how aware I was of the impact of KCP on their lives prior to the interview, and sought my reaction to the information they were giving me during the interview. There was a respectful reciprocity, natural two-way conversation. This type of interaction is described by Ellis and Berger as reflexive dyadic interviewing, where ‘the interview is conducted more as a conversation between two equals’ (2003:472). Reinharz and Chase speak of interviewer self disclosure which takes place when:

...the interviewer shares ideas, attitudes, and/or experiences concerning matters that might relate to the interview topic in order to encourage respondents to be more forthcoming (79:2003).

There was no need on my behalf to disclose information ‘to encourage respondents to be more forthcoming’. Data was disclosed as a matter of principle. After all, if I was presuming to ask them questions, why then would I be exempt from answering their questions? This is especially so since the dynamic between interviewer and interviewee echoed previous shared experiences where we had attended classes, social events, and trips together. Ellis et al. view ‘researchers’ disclosures as more than tactics to encourage respondents to open up’ (1997:121). They acknowledge and

value ‘feelings, insights and stories that researchers bring to the interactive encounter’ (ibid. 121).

This study afforded an insight into how various services worked to offer an holistic and integrated service to the community of learners. The impact on individual services of working within an integrated model is also addressed.

Ultimately this study aims to generate and share knowledge through the generation of theory, firmly located in the life stories and experiences of the research participants and myself, as researcher. Strauss and Corbin define grounded theory as ‘a general methodology for developing grounded theory in data systematically gathered and analysed’ (1994:273). These methodologies or tools function within the philosophical framework of the feminist emancipatory paradigm as outlined above. Feminist Emancipatory Research makes demands of the researcher and the participants. It requires the researcher to be an active agent, and a sympathetic listener. The researcher needs to facilitate an inclusive process, paying attention to his/her own role, motives, and philosophy. FER sees participants as active agents, involved in the co-construction of knowledge, engaging in, and interrogating their own experiences. Participants emerge with skills and insights acquired in the process of naming their worlds. FER has guided the processes of this study.

It may seem on first appraisal that feminist emancipatory research and grounded theory are unlikely bedfellows. Theory generation with attention to systematic analysis might not at first seem compatible with the ‘softer’ interpersonal emphasis of the feminist emancipatory research paradigm. GTM offers a tool kit. Feminist Emancipatory Research offers a philosophy, a framework to inform the process of creating knowledge. Both offer scaffolding to build and develop knowledge based on the rich lived experiences shared between the participants and myself. It is within that dynamic that knowledge is created. Successful generation of knowledge depends on my ability to ask the right questions, to understand the answers, and to garner the shared wisdom.

According to Aull Davies, ‘the most common interpretation of the ethnographic present is undoubtedly the practice of developing analysis and generalisations from ethnographic research as if they represent a timeless description of people

being studied (1999: 156). Aull Davies sees this approach as an implicit 'denial of the historicity of these people' (ibid:156). Freire, celebrating the human capacity to discover 'our temporality', declares that we 'reach back to yesterday, recognise today, and come upon tomorrow' (1974:3). The story embedded in this thesis is located within the aforementioned evolutionary paradigm.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**DATA SOURCES AND COLLECTION PROCESS**



## **4. DATA SOURCES AND COLLECTION PROCESS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I outline the extent and variety of primary and secondary data sources which are the basis of this study. While both quantitative and qualitative data inform this study, qualitative data in the form of participant interviews and focus groups are the principle data sources. When I was initially designing this thesis I conceptualised a much smaller study. However, as preliminary interview research results emerged and indeed as the research question gained clarity, I realised that the scale and scope of data required would need to be adjusted accordingly. Let me be more specific. As I analysed the initial interviews the emerging findings indicated that many factors accounted for and contributed to the survival, success and sustainability of KCP. These included leadership style, lack of hierarchical systems, consultative decision-making, and a symbiotic relationships between the host school, the FÁS Community Employment scheme, and Kileely Community Project (KCP). The FÁS Community Employment scheme (CE) , is operated by Ireland's training and employment authority and is designed to help people who are unemployed and suffering other disadvantages to get back into the workforce. It offers part-time job opportunities based in local communities. During the lifespan of this study the FÁS CE scheme was established in the host school. In order to validate and triangulate these findings I needed to interview people who worked and participated in a variety of activities in the school building. I therefore interviewed participants who worked in the school in temporary or permanent capacities, and who held managerial or non-managerial positions. My interview participants were also engaged in the various initiatives within KCP. I also had recourse to a rich and varied bank of secondary data. In brief, this study is informed by an extensive and comprehensive research database.

### **4.2 Qualitative and quality research**

Effective data collection and analysis are the bedrock of quality research. However, since qualitative studies suffer some degree of scepticism from within the research community, it is crucial that data collection and analysis processes are clearly defined and understood. According to Charmaz, 'obtaining rich data provides a solid foundation for developing robust theories' (2003:313). Silverman, conscious of reliability within the field of qualitative research, states that the 'quality of data

should be high in qualitative research' (2005: 220). Furthermore, Silverman emphasises the responsibility of the researcher to inform his/her audience of the processes involved in data gathering and analysis stating that '... our readers should expect to be told how we gathered our data, what data we ended up with and how we analysed it (ibid: 303).

As previously noted Silverman (2005), Fontana and Frey (1994), among others attest to the challenges of doing qualitative research. According to Lieblich et al. qualitative researchers by the nature of their work deal with a surprising quantity of data (1998:9). Furthermore the nature of narrative is that 'no two interviews are alike, and the uniqueness of narrative is manifested in extremely rich data' (ibid:9). Certainly conducting and analysing fifty individual interviews, and six focus groups, as well as feedback sessions, demanded on-going review, analysis, self-reflective practice, and a steep learning curve.

#### **4.3 Interview process**

Interviews were both recorded and written, except on one occasion when one participant did not agree to be interviewed but opted instead to write answers to prescribed questions. Field notes, made immediately after each interview, recorded contextual details such as time, location and duration. Observations made before, during, and after the interview had taken place were also recorded. According to Silverman, preserving the 'details of interaction' helps with later analysis (2005: 174). Secondary sources included visual data, such as photographs and video footage, print data such as newspaper cuttings, letters, reports, and census information, and audio data such as recordings of radio programmes in which KCP featured.

#### **4.4 Primary data Sources**

This section profiles research participants and describes the format, location, and duration of the interview processes. Interview participants, are viewed in this study as 'embodiments of lived stories' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:43). Participants are described in terms of their relationship to this study, gender, length of time involved, and whether there is a family or intergenerational aspect to that person's involvement with KCP.



#### 4.4.1 Interview Participant Profiles

Participants are divided into two categories. Firstly I will profile the target group, that is, those participants who were directly involved with KCP. These include mature and young adult learners, former ‘Three O’Clock School’ participants, members of the SPACE project, committee members, and mothers of ‘Three O’Clock School’ participants. I also interviewed ‘non-target’ participants. This group was made up of members of the school staff, both teaching staff and ancillary staff, funders, and volunteers. In this chapter I profile each of these sub groups separately. Table 4.1 below profiles the numbers of participants involved in individual and focus group interview.

**Table 4.1 Interview participant profiles**

Interview category	Group membership	Number of individual interviews	Numbers of individual interviewees attending for focus group sessions
Mature adult learners	Target group	13	4
Young adult learners	Target group	11	3
SPACE participants	Target group	6	4
Former ‘Three O’Clock School’ members	Target group	10	4
Mothers of ‘Three O’Clock School’ attendees	Target group	7	
Tutors	Non-target group	6	
Committee members	Target group	4	4
Teachers	Non-target group	6	4
Ancillary staff	Non-target group	6	
Volunteer	Non-target group	1	
Statutory organisation representative	Non-target group	1	

Note: The four committee members were also mature adult learners. Some of the mothers of the ‘Three O’Clock School’ attendees were also young and mature adult learners. A total of fifty individual interviews were carried out as well as six focus groups.

#### **4.4.1.1 Participants directly involved with Kileely Community Project**

The participants directly involved with KCP includes all target adult and child learners. These include mature adult learners, young adult learners, SPACE participants, ‘Three O’Clock School’ participants, mothers of target ‘Three O’Clock School’ participants and committee members.

##### **4.4.1.1.1 Target group: Mature adult learners, profile and process**

I interviewed a total of thirteen mature adult learners all of whom were female. Nine were actively involved with KCP at the time of interview. The other four had been involved for a minimum of ten years. Of the four who were not actively involved, two expressed an interest in resuming classes, one had joined another project, and one had left the area. Nine were interviewed in their homes and four in the school. Four participants were members of the committee and three had daughters involved in the SPACE project. Three mature adult learners had also been involved with their children in the ‘Three O’Clock School’. The participants were selected because of the duration of their involvement, the variety of classes they attend, and their availability. All interviewees I approached agreed to be interviewed. I approached some participants in the school where they were attending classes and others in their homes. The average length of interview was 55 minutes.

The focus group of mature learners took place in the school. Four women attended, all of whom had been interviewed individually. The focus group lasted for 60 minutes. The interviewees are coded as mature adult learners, mature adult learners and committee members, and mature adult learners and ‘Three O’Clock School’ mothers.

These mature women, ‘who never got the chance of school’, had raised their families through the lean times of the 1980s, which they graphically described as an era of unemployment and depression. Some families experienced the mass emigration of the

late 1950s, and some participants had gone to work in the mills in England when as young as fifteen years of age. These non-traditional learners were a very resilient group of women. When they joined KCP they effectively broke with tradition and began to forge new lives, indeed new identities. Prior to attending KCP, they 'had no place to go, no meeting place'. They described being 'tied to the house', bound by family obligations, without opportunities for self-development or socialising:

You're tied to a house, especially if you had a big family ... an awful lot ... and the longer you stay in it, the more you are left in it. Do you know that kind of a way? The kids were young at the time and I found myself it was an outlet for me. ... It was kinda getting a break away from the family, like you know. And it gives you a better outlook at well. It does, cos you meet other people and you hear a lot of things (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 2).

These housebound women felt a deep sense of isolation, 'an awful longing' for adult company, and conversation. They felt 'they missed out, they wanted knowledge'. Personal, family, and societal circumstances had previously deprived them of that experience. Poverty and lack of resources created formidable barriers:

I got this terrible thing [need] that I have to have some adult conversation. Something apart from, 'I hope to get the washing dry' and you know all the little things. And I had an awful longing just to have a different kind of a conversation. And a feeling ... To get away from the children for a while. And you came back and you looked at them in a different light. Cos you weren't exhausted from being in the house and around children all the time. I mean you couldn't afford any other kind of amusement I suppose you would call it. Money was a factor (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 1).

The needs of adult learners were articulated in terms of academic and social needs. Women developed deep caring relationships with each other and supported each other through personal and family bereavements and tragedies. Women voted with their feet. They came together to learn, to socialise, and to explore their learning needs. It was counter cultural, as previous 'outlets' were limited to Mass on Sundays, and maybe an odd drink once a week, but then:

Monday to the following Saturday you were looking after children, cooking, and washing, and bathing them, getting them ready for Saturday and Sunday again ... The majority I know, that was their lives. Men could go out anytime they liked (Mature adult learner no. 2).

The mature learners were articulate, passionate, and insightful. Some of the young women I interviewed were daughters of these mature women, others were young women living or working in the area. One young woman recollected that women

'back then' were housewives, with little resources, and few opportunities to get to know each other:

It was hard back then. You were a kind of a house wife. I'd say like, 90% of the population was a housewife really weren't they? They didn't have much like. It gave them something to look forward to, as well like. Back then money wasn't really great, and people were housewives. It got them out of the house, and it helped adults to get to know each other as well. It really did benefit them ('Three O'Clock School' participant no .8).

These young women were very aware of the effects of KCP on the mature women's lives. Young women described the isolation of their mothers and rejoiced at the transformation brought into their mother's lives by the opportunity to 'belong', and be involved, and 'do her own thing':

It was great for my mother to come over to classes, for her to get away from the family. Because she had spent so many years looking after her family, that I don't ever remember my mother being in anything until the classes started over here. So I thought that was great for her. Cos she got out to do her own thing like (SPACE participant no.4).

A number of factors limited these women's access to education and the power to make decisions about their lives. Gender inequality, poverty, and lack of opportunities contributed to making learning inaccessible to women. These women typically worked in the home, 'had nothing to show for it', and lived in a social context in which family finances were sometimes but not always controlled by men:

She [participant's mother] worked all her life. She had nothing for it, nothing to show for it, no income. The man had the money, and he controlled it. He gave her the few pound wages, and you got your messages [groceries]. And that was it. D'you know what I mean? You had to wait for your allowance [state children's allowance] to have anything spared (Ancillary staff no. 3).

These mature women became the bedrock on which the project grew.

#### **4.4.1.1.2 Target group: Young adult learners, profile and process**

I interviewed eleven young adult learners. Five were actively involved at the time of interview, one had emigrated, and one had moved to live on the other side of the city. All non-attendees were aware of the programmes on offer but had either work or family commitments affecting their availability to attend classes. All had been involved for a minimum of 3 years prior to the interview. Eight were interviewed in

the school and three in their homes. School based interviews facilitated young women whose children were attending school, pre-school, or crèche at the time of interview. One participant had been involved with the 'Three O'Clock School' as a mother, and one as a participant. Three had been involved in the SPACE project as young mothers. Two young women had worked on the FÁS Community Employment scheme based in the school. This group was selected based on their age profile, the variety of classes they attended, the length of involvement and their willingness to participate. All eleven young women approached agreed to be interviewed. The average length of interview was 56 minutes.

A focus group of young women was held in the school. Three young women attended this group. The focus group lasted 59 minutes.

This diverse group of learners were all mothers, some parenting alone, others in partnerships. Seven of these interviewees had participated in other aspects of KCP. Many of these young women were also early school leavers, who viewed KCP as 'a second chance to improve themselves and their children'. They too valued the social aspect of KCP, specifically the opportunity to belong in a group of learners of mixed ages and experience. They felt they had support from the mature women who 'had raised their families' and who gave them advice.

Financial restrictions too played a part in impeding access to learning. The small contribution towards the cost of running KCP was never an impediment to involvement or accessibility. A beaker was left to the side and people contributed, or not, depending on their circumstances. As one young woman said, 'no one ever put me under pressure to put that 50p in the cup, if you had it you had it, if you didn't it didn't matter'. These young women had high aspirations for their children and continually shared information pertinent to supporting their children's attainment. This diverse group, all with family responsibilities, all in different financial circumstances, had much in common. Ultimately, they wanted to learn, to belong, and to support their children's learning.

#### **4.4.1.1.3 Target group: SPACE participants, profile and process**

The SPACE project was set up to address the needs of young women who had become young mothers and were not attending the adult education classes. I interviewed six former SPACE participants along with their facilitator who is also a member of KCP committee. The SPACE project ran for two years with one cohort of participants. The former SPACE facilitator, a member of KCP committee, helped me to locate these young women. All interviews took place in the school, some at night to facilitate their work schedules. Four of the six were employed at the time of interview. One was an active member of the adult education classes, one had ceased coming to adult education classes due to family commitments, and one was working on the FÁS Community Employment Scheme in the school. All members of this group were aware of the broader KCP programme, as their mothers were also members of the project. The average length of interview was 63 minutes. They all readily agreed to be interviewed.

Four of the six attended for a focus group, along with the group facilitator. The focus group interview lasted two hours.

Unlike the adult learners and committee members who meet regularly this group had not been together as a group for over fourteen years so the focus group provided a forum to renew acquaintances, as well as functioning as a focus group for this research project. The focus group lasted for 82 minutes. One member gave me a copy of a video which had been made in the early years of the SPACE project, and this proved a rich source of data.

This group had journeyed together in a struggle to raise their children and reinvent themselves as mothers, women, and learners. After becoming mothers, these young women who lived in their family homes, needed to get out of the ‘safety’ of their homes and reintegrate into society. They spoke of the physical and social isolation they had felt from their peers. They were surrounded by supportive families, but still sometimes felt ‘on their own, isolated, and embarrassed’. One young woman said she felt her ‘life was over, everyone was talking about her’. But in the safe nurturing SPACE they supported each other, talked about their dreams, and engaged in a process of transformation. They were a courageous group of young women whose

passionate love, combined with an acute sense of responsibility for their babies, was inspirational.

#### **4.4.1.1.4 Target group: ‘Three O’Clock School’ participants, profile and process**

I interviewed ten former ‘Three O’Clock School’ participants, three female and seven male. The ‘Three O’Clock School’ is an after school programme offering academic, social, and creative learning opportunities to young people after school hours. Four interviews took place in the school, the remainder in participants’ homes. The four interviews which took place in the school were single person interviews, one took place over two sessions. The interviews which took place in homes varied between single person and focus group interviews. It happened that in the process of interviewing individuals, other family members who had previously attended the ‘Three O’Clock School’, came into the room and joined in the ‘conversation’. Houses are small and don’t necessarily have private spaces for interviews. I interviewed two members of one family and four members of another family who had been actively involved. I also interviewed the mothers of both these families. The ten participants came from six families, four of whom had mothers directly involved in the ‘Three O’Clock School’. Nine of the ten had other siblings involved in the ‘Three O’Clock School’. One had a sibling involved with the SPACE project. This group was made up of students I had worked with directly in the ‘Three O’Clock School’ when I was a tutor in the early years, and some who became involved shortly after I had left the ‘Three O’Clock School’. I knew them all well as I continued to be involved in various activities of the ‘Three O’Clock School’ after I returned to teaching. I had taught some of them in mainstream school. All the former ‘Three O’Clock School’ students I approached were willing to be interviewed. The average length of interview was 37 minutes.

Four participants attended for a focus group which was held in the school in the evening. The focus group lasted 82 minutes.

These former ‘Three O’Clock School’ students were acutely aware, not only of the benefits, but of the need for the ‘Three O’Clock School’ in their lives. They spoke of the financial restrictions within their families, which meant that they had had few

opportunities for holidays or other ‘extras’ that other families had. They acknowledged the physical and psychological safety they experienced in the ‘Three O’Clock School’. They acknowledged the nutritional and social benefits, all of which were built on respectful, loving relationships. This articulate group of young men and women reflected with sincerity, passion, and appreciation on the opportunities the ‘Three O’Clock School’ afforded them.

#### **4.4.1.1.5 Target group: Mothers of former ‘Three O’Clock School’ participants, profile and process**

The ‘Three O’Clock School’ welcomed the involvement of parents, and also older siblings. Some mothers became directly involved working closely on a daily basis delivering the programme. Others accompanied the group on trips or attended parties and celebrations. I interviewed seven mothers of children attending the ‘Three O’Clock School’.

Five mothers had been directly involved on a daily basis at different stages in the ‘Three O’Clock School’, one mother who was a former ‘Three O’Clock School’ participant herself, and one mother whose children were involved was not directly involved in the ‘Three O’Clock School’. One interviewee was also a member of the KCP committee, and all attended as adult learners in the project. Six were interviewed in their homes, and one in the school. These mothers were all involved in the first seven years of the development of the ‘Three O’Clock School’. The average length of interview was 48 minutes.

The mothers who worked in the ‘Three O’Clock School’ came to the school for two and a half hours between two and four days per week. They also participated in daytrips and holidays. Most of these women had attended my morning class, ‘Parents and Children Learning Together’, and the ‘Three O’Clock School’ afforded them an opportunity to put what they had learned into practice. Furthermore, it afforded me a chance to model teaching and social and communication skills. While each mother worked with her own child, she also worked actively with other children. The mothers worked co-operatively with the tutors, and in a combined and co-ordinated effort mothers and tutors offered an exciting and challenging programme of activities to the children. In tandem with tutors these mothers cooked, read, painted, and played



games. The combined effort created a nurturing, supportive, learning environment in which children saw their mothers in the role of teacher and friend.

#### **4.4.1.1.6 Target group: Kileely Community Project committee members, profile and process**

I interviewed all four committee members individually and as a focus group. Two of the original members are deceased. Two interviews took place in the school and two in their own homes. One member was also the facilitator for the SPACE project. One member was very active in the 'Three O'Clock School', and three members had daughters involved in the SPACE project. This group was selected because they have been running the project since its inception. All readily agreed to be interviewed individually, and the average length of interview was 70 minutes.

The focus group took place in the school and all committee members attended, the focus group lasted 68 minutes.

These local, committed, practical women are the engine room of KCP. They have worked in a voluntary capacity for over twenty years. They live in the locality and attend all the adult education classes. This affords them a daily insight into the concerns of the community. They intimately understand and respect the needs of adult learners, children, the school, and the community. As a committee they make decisions, raise funds, arrange trips, social events, and guest speakers. On a daily basis they communicate with the school on issues such as use of facilities and equipment. They adapt the timetable of the KCP to dovetail with the school timetable. These women follow up on women who are not attending classes due to illness or to family circumstances. They have individual strengths, the combination of which creates an effective, caring committee.

#### **4.4.1.2 Non-target group**

The non-target group is made up of tutors who taught in the adult classes and the 'Three O'Clock School', teachers who worked in the school, ancillary staff, a volunteer and a member of the statutory agency which supported KCP through the provision of grants and tutors.

#### **4.4.1.2.1 Non-target group: Tutors, profile and process**

I interviewed a total of six tutors<sup>1</sup>, five female and one male. Two of the six tutors worked with adults and with the ‘Three O’Clock School’. Three tutors were actively teaching with KCP at the time of interview and three had previously worked as tutors. Of the three actively involved one was also an active tutor in the ‘Three O’Clock School’ for almost twenty years. Of the three not currently teaching in KCP, all had been involved at the early stages of the project. One had continued to be involved for over twenty years of the project, working not only with adults but as a tutor in the ‘Three O’Clock School’ and also as a teacher in the school itself. Another was a retired Principal of the school, and had worked in the area for over twenty years. Three participants were interviewed in their homes, one in a nursing home and two in the school. One tutor also attended as an adult learner. This group was selected based on the variety of classes they taught, length of time involved with KCP, and their availability and willingness to participate. All tutors who were approached agreed to be interviewed. The average length of interview was 61 minutes.

Tutoring in an adult community education context demands specialised skills and abilities. Successful tutoring moves well beyond knowledge of a subject area, to an ability to communicate effectively, and respectfully, with a group of adults, many of whom come to adult education with a sense of failure from their previous school experiences. This may be heightened when the ‘second chance’ is being offered in a school context. Tutors therefore needed to be conscious of the context in which adult education opportunities were being offered. Tutors working within a community education context must have the capacity to acknowledge their students’ expertise, prior learning, and aspirations. The tutors I interviewed engaged with the learning process in a proactive, reflective manner, working in partnership with their students. They believed the learning environment was enhanced by a student led agenda, and an ethos of partnership. These tutors conceptualised learning as a two-way process, in that, they too were learning from their students. The tutors who worked in the ‘Three O’Clock School’ had a deep commitment to the welfare of children. They built exceptionally supportive relationships with the children and nurtured their academic, social, emotional, and psychological development.

#### **4.4.1.2.2 Non-target group: Teachers, profile and process**

I interviewed six teachers, including four of the active teaching staff and two retired teachers. The active teaching staff included the Principal, home school community liaison officer, a class teacher and a resource teacher. The Principal had been a staff member in the school prior to taking up the role of Principal (on my departure) and had worked in the school since 1992. The home school community liaison coordinators held a shared position between three primary schools in the parish, and had been involved with St. Lelia's school since 1998. The classroom teacher had been in the school for four years at the time of interview. The resource teacher had been involved with KCP as an adult tutor, a 'Three O'Clock School' tutor, and as a classroom volunteer, prior to teaching in the school. While the Principal, home school community liaison officer and resource teacher were selected for the key positions they held, the classroom teacher interviewee was selected by the staff at a staff meeting. Three of the active staff interviews took place in the school and one in the teacher's home. Two retired teachers, both former Principals were interviewed, one in her home and one in a nursing home. One of the retired Principals had worked as a voluntary literacy tutor in the early years of KCP. The average length of interview was 59 minutes. The teachers' focus group took place in the school, all active staff members who had been previously interviewed individually attended. The focus group lasted 51 minutes.

The school teaching staff were committed, hardworking, and aspirational. They operated an inclusive policy which nurtured family and community involvement. On a practical level, they shared the traditional teachers' staff room space, the kitchen, with KCP, because adult classes, the 'Three O'Clock School', and meetings all took place within 'the kitchen'. They saw the school as a learning resource for the community. They supported KCP in a practical sense by allowing their classrooms to be used for adult education classes and the 'Three O'Clock School' in the afternoons and evenings.

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<sup>1</sup> To differentiate between teachers in the school and project, I use the term tutors to describe the teachers within the project, whether tutors of adult classes or the 3 o'clock school. I use the term

#### **4.4.1.2.3 Non-target group: Ancillary staff, profile and process**

I interviewed six ancillary staff. This sub group included two caretakers, one of whom was retired and one active. One interview took place in the school and the second in the participant's home. I also interviewed one Special Needs Assistant<sup>2</sup> (SNA) and two FÁS CE workers along with the supervisor from the FÁS CE scheme. Those four interviews took place in the school. One FÁS CE worker was also a former SPACE group participant and young adult learner. The FÁS CE scheme supervisor was also a member of the KCP committee and a mature adult learner. The average interview time for ancillary staff was 60 minutes.

Five of the interviewees worked in the school at the time of interview and one had retired, but had on-going contact through family members. As such this group were informal 'witnesses' to how the activities of KCP manifested themselves in terms of participant engagement, and in terms of implications for the daily business of the school. They, like many other participants saw KCP as part of a 'service package' to the community. This service package included the school, crèche, pre-school, and KCP. These participants had attended, worked in, or been involved with other schools prior to working in St. Lelia's. They benchmarked their experiences through comparison with prior experiences. They were forthright, insightful, honest and articulate.

#### **4.4.1.2.4 Non-target group: Volunteer, profile and process**

I interviewed one volunteer, who provided the transport for trips organised by the 'Three O'Clock School', in her home. The interview lasted 55 minutes. This transport was a lifeline to us and made it possible for the 'Three O'Clock School' to visit places of educational, social and cultural interest.

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teacher to describe the teachers in the school.

<sup>2</sup> Special Needs Assistants (SNA) provide classroom support for children with a range of needs, including learning, behavioural and physical needs.

#### **4.4.1.2.5 Non-target group: Statutory agency representative, profile and process**

I interviewed one senior person from the City of Limerick City Vocational Educational Committee (CLVEC), the main funding agency associated with the KCP. This person had been supportive of the project from the beginning and was very aware of community education developments over time, not just within KCP, but within a city-wide and national and international context. This interview took place in the Boardroom of CLVEC and lasted 95 minutes.

#### **4.5 Secondary data sources**

Secondary sources include visual data such as photographs and video footage, print data such as newspaper cuttings, letters, reports, and census data, and audio data such as radio programmes. Appendix B contains a list of secondary data.

Aull Davies warns of the danger of being ‘less critical’ of peripheral data sources (1999:161). She cautions ethnographers to be vigilant for authentic sources, to be conscious of an intended audience, and to recognise the reality of incompleteness of records (ibid: 161-162). She also raises concerns that ‘those with greater social power and cultural capital are also much more likely to create documents’ which in turn are ‘more likely to be preserved’ (ibid:162). Thus ‘the sorts of questions ethnographic researchers need to ask of and about documentary sources are not dissimilar to those they pose when dealing with more conventional ethnographic data such as interviews or observations’ (ibid: 163).

My extensive store of photographs proved to be a valuable resource. Indeed, Pink contends that images ‘are inextricably interwoven with our personal identities, narratives, lifestyles, cultures and societies’ (2007:21). According to Harper the photo elicitation interview (PEI) ‘is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview’ (2002:13). Banks draws our attention to how photographs ‘invoke comments, memory, and discussion in the course of a semi-structured interview’ (2001:87). Researchers who choose PEI as a methodology may use either photographs they have taken themselves or photographs the research participants have taken. Harper contends that photo elicitation extends along a continuum, at one extreme photographs are used as ‘visual inventories of objects, people and artefacts’

(2002:13). In the middle, 'are images that depict events that were part of collective or institutional pasts ... these images may connect an individual to experiences or eras even if the images do not reflect the research subject's actual lives' (ibid:13). Finally, at the other extreme, are photographs that 'portray the intimate dimensions of social-family or other intimate social group' (ibid:13). The photographs used in this study fall into the latter category. They depict everyday activities in the 'Three O'Clock School' such as baking, reading, and playing. They depict award ceremonies where adults receive certification for courses attended, and they depict social events such as trips and holidays for adults and children.

Harper also contends that 'images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words' (2002:13). I used photographs in my interviews with former 'Three O'Clock School' participants. Harper's contention that 'photographs appear to capture the impossible ... that extraordinary sense of seeming to retrieve something that has disappeared belongs alone to the photograph, and it leads to deep and interesting talk', (ibid:23) resonated with my experience of showing childhood photographs to young adults. Harper contends that photo elicitation must, like all research methodologies, be considered in terms of its ability to enrich the research context, conscious of its limitations.

While acknowledging the effectiveness of using photographs in this way, the literature also highlights some limitations and considerations. In some research contexts participants supply the photographs for PEI. Since this methodology has become popular in relation to interviewing children the use of cameras by children to capture their social environments raises ethical and moral considerations. Since PEI can bring the researcher into the personal and social world of the participant, Clark-Ibanez cautions researchers to 'strike a delicate balance between their goal of collecting data and retaining compassion for participants' (2004:1517). Furthermore, researchers who take the photographs they subsequently use in the research process must reflect on the types of images they capture. Clark-Ibanez also discovered the power of photographs in generating discussion within family contexts (ibid:1515). I also used photographs within family contexts and found them a powerful means of stimulating discussion and aiding memory. On one occasion, when an interview was held over two sessions, the participant took the photographs to show to her siblings who had also been involved in KCP. She reported how much they enjoyed looking at

the photographs as siblings and recounted the memories they recalled. On another occasion a mother was moved to tears as she viewed images of herself and her children, these images captured the ‘best time of her life’:

Interviewer: How do you feel looking at them (the photographs)

Participant: I feel like crying

Interviewer: Are they good memories

Participant: Yes. Best time of my life.

The use of photographs in the interview process can bring many benefits. On a practical level the introduction of photographs ‘can ease rapport between the researcher and interviewee’ (Clark Ibanez, 2004:1512). Furthermore, images and contexts can inform discussions, provide a focus, and shift the power dynamic within the interview (ibid:1512).

Photographs proved to be a potent source of inspiration and triangulation. At a preliminary stage of interview design, I used photographs, along with video footage and newspaper clippings to inform my interview questions and support me in identifying potential interview participants. At the conclusion of interviews I used photographs as a means of verification or to triangulate findings. Finally, I made copies of photographs for the participants and gave them as gifts. While ‘visual research methods have theoretically played a minor role in social research’, (Epstein et al., 2006: 2) in the past, my experience with this research project and with others I am involved with, lead me to believe that the use of visual methodologies has the potential to enrich the research process significantly.

Visual data or visual documentary materials comprised approx 400 photographs and twelve pieces of video footage. I had taken many photographs during the years as a means of recording, and as gifts to the families involved in the project. KCP was set up in the 1980s, a time of high unemployment, and many families would not have had the luxury of a camera.

While I had taken all the photographs and as such they reflected the images I chose to capture, some of the video footage was recorded by outside facilitators. I made limited footage of the ‘Three O’Clock School’ and the women’s holidays. The SPACE project video was compiled in association with the SPACE group facilitator and a lecturer in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. Also I had access

to a focus group video of adult learners made in the early days of KCP. This was compiled by CLVEC tutors. I had no input into the design or content of the SPACE video, however, I did have an input into the adult learners' focus group video as a participant. A focus group video made in 1991, with the original residents of the estate, all in their 80s was also made available to me. This was filmed in the school. I helped to identify possible participants and was present when this video was being made. Finally, in the late stages of this research project, a former 'Three O'Clock School' tutor 'found' video footage which had been taken by a friend of hers on a visit to the school and to the 'Three O'Clock School'. Video footage affords the opportunity to observe specific events occurring within context, as well as interaction and communication patterns between people. It offers an opportunity to gain an insight into the quality and dynamics of relationships and interaction. It too serves as a form of triangulation.

Print documentary materials included newspaper cuttings, letters, reports and census data. Newspaper coverage offers an insight into the events and celebrations associated with the project. I also have copies of letters and reports I wrote seeking funding from various agencies. A letter from a social worker in the area requesting the Mid Western Health Board to support this project offers an insight into how a care worker positively viewed the impact of KCP on the lives of families. KCP reports compiled to raise the profile of the project, and advocate for funding, were also used to inform analysis. Census data was used to inform Chapter Five 'Area profile'. Area profile reports commissioned for the area are also consulted.

Audio documentary materials includes recordings of radio programmes in which KCP featured at national and local level. Apart from my own voice, these recordings include the voices of children and adults involved in the project and serve to both contextualise and triangulate the study.

#### **4.6 Summary**

In this chapter I have described the variety of data used to inform this study. The main sources of data are unquestionably individual and focus group interviews, as well as on-going observations. Secondary data sources, extensive in their own right, served to inform, validate, and triangulate findings.



## **4.7 Chapter conclusion**

This study profiles the growth and development of KCP. It asks fundamental questions about the nature of impact of KCP on people's lives, and seeks to excavate the processes and structures that enabled KCP to survive, succeed and be sustainable over a twenty year period. The answers to these questions are embedded in the data collected. The success of this research project depends on the collection and analysis of high quality data, and my ability to communicate this effectively to you the reader.

In this chapter I have endeavoured to describe the process of data collection and to profile the participants who provided the data. This is in essence the raw material. In Chapter Three, 'Methodology : Beyond Tools of Inquiry' I explained my rationale and methodology for the processing of data. Furthermore Chapter Three also outlined the research objectives, provided a rationale for the development of a research framework, proposed a feminist research emancipatory research stance, and described the process of analysis.



**CHAPTER FIVE**

**AREA PROFILE**



## **5. AREA PROFILE**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study describes and evaluates the evolution and impact of Kileely Community Project (KCP) over a twenty-year period, from 1985 to 2005. KCP developed within specific economic, social, and cultural conditions. Dramatic and profound changes in the demographic, social, and economic profile of Ireland took place within this time period. This chapter, augmented by Appendix C, describes the context in which KCP developed with reference to the national and more specifically to the local context. I draw on extensive census and interview data to describe the economic, social, and educational context in which this project evolved. In this chapter I outline the national context, and subsequently the local context.

### **5.2 The national context**

It is not within the remit of this thesis to offer an in depth analysis of the economic and social changes which took place in Ireland in the twenty year span from 1985 to 2005. It is, I hope, however, feasible to describe the major shifts and developments which occurred within that time period, thereby offering a generalised rather than a detailed analysis of changes in Irish life.

#### **5.2.1 The national context: The 1980s**

The 1980s was ‘an excruciating period of Irish economic history, with negative employment growth, unemployment reaching some 17 per cent, high outward migration, and seemingly insoluble problems in the public finances’ (O’Reardon, 2001:113). The unemployment rate more than doubled between 1980 and 1987, and significantly, ‘within this unemployed population there was also an increase in the incidence of long-term unemployment: the proportion of the unemployed out of work for more than a year rose from 34 per cent to 45 per cent’ (Callan et al., 1989:102).

Profoundly disturbed by the increasing levels of poverty Daly wrote ‘compelling evidence exists ... showing that poverty is a fact of life for many’ (1989:5). In Daly’s in depth investigation of poverty she problematises the nature of poverty, the realities and consequences of living with poverty, and the categories of people who are likely to live with poverty. Daly excavates the impact of living with poverty by listening to

the voices of women who live in poverty (1989). These voices strongly resonate with the voices of my own research participants.

Daly's work critiques existing research and highlights the gaps in understanding in relation to how poverty affects the quality of women's lives. For example, family income studies calculate the percentage of families living below the poverty line with reference to levels of family income. She contends that household income is not necessarily a good indication of the amount of money the woman may have access to in order to run the household. She decries the absence of studies in this area, and highlights cases where separated women, who in theory have less money to live on due to their separated status, in reality have a stable increased income because in their separated status they both control and manage the money for the household. Social and family circumstances, expectations about women's role in society, and the degree to which women have control over family finances all influence how poverty is experienced.

### **5.2.2 The national context: The 1990s**

A decade later Nolan and Watson again highlight the gaps in our understanding of how low income/poverty affects individual members within households as opposed to a household as a unit. They contend that 'conventional methods of analysis of poverty and income inequality take the household or the narrower family as the income recipient unit, and assume resources are shared so that each individual in a given household/family has the same standard of living' (1999:129). It is clear that there is still a lot to be understood about poverty, power, and family dynamics, if we are to fully understand the reality and consequences of living on low income.

After years of high unemployment and low economic growth the mid to late nineties saw the unprecedented growth in the Irish economy, when 'a wave of prosperity, popularly referred to as the 'Celtic Tiger' (Pringle et al., 1999: 1) washed over our country. According to Callan et al. by 1994 Ireland had seen 'a very considerable increase of 92,000, in the numbers at work compared to 1987'(1996:59). However, they point out that 'the labour force growth was also very rapid, amounting to 77,000 over the period, with the result that the numbers unemployed fell by only 15,000'(1996:59).

### **5.2.3 The national context: The growth of the Celtic Tiger era**

The growth of the Celtic Tiger heralded increased prosperity, reduced unemployment, and significant changes in lifestyle. According to O'Reardon, this economic growth was both 'rapid and profound', and had a 'significant impact on the daily lives of millions of citizens' (2001:111). Erikson summarises these changes as: an increase in national income, a decrease in unemployment, a changing occupational structure with more women involved in the work force, higher alcohol consumption, more obesity, decrease in demand for unskilled labour, decline in birth rates, increased commuting distances, increase in the numbers of young people living alone, increase in separations and divorce, increase in the number of dual-earner families, increase in the rates of crime against the person, and finally a change from being a country of emigration to a country of immigration (2007:269). This dramatic shift was due to a number of factors. O'Reardon contends that while 'recent Irish prosperity' cannot be ascribed to a single cause, 'social partnership has been a fundamental driver in the economic change and has come to constitute a system of political economy which has had a profound effect on how the economy has developed, how wealth is produced and how it is distributed' (2001: 113).

### **5.2.4 The national context: The Celtic Tiger era, impact of the poverty gap**

The Celtic Tiger saw 'the gap in average income between Ireland and the richer OECD countries narrow dramatically' (Nolan and Maitre, 2007: 27). Using GDP per capita as a measure of income, Ireland moved from 'about 60 per cent of the EU average to over 120 per cent of the average' (ibid: 28). However, the Celtic Tiger did not bring equal advantages to all sectors within Irish society, as 'Ireland continued to have a high degree of economic inequality in comparative terms after the boom, just as it did beforehand' (ibid: 27). As previously stated we still have a lot to learn about understanding and measuring poverty, and statistical measurements are but one source of information. However, statistical comparisons of income poverty between 1994 and 2001 reveal a disturbing profile of a country in which there was a rise of 6 percent in the numbers of people living below the 60 per cent relative poverty threshold (ibid: 38). Nolan and Maitre attribute this phenomena in large part to the fact that social security rates 'lagged significantly behind the very rapid rise in income from work and property' (ibid: 38). Tovey and Share contend that while

‘Ireland contains few people living in the *absolute poverty* experienced at times in some developing countries ... much of the population remains in situations where they are denied many of the attributes of an acceptable social life’ (2003: 167). Pringle et al. highlight outcome discrepancies noting that ‘large tracts of public housing in Dublin and other major cities’ have been bypassed by the prosperity growth (1999: 1). Kirby, with reference to Keenan, warns of the danger that ‘the gap between the well-off and the poor can grow ... even while the income of the poor increases in real terms’ (2001:1), increasing inequality between classes. In their analysis of income profiles during the 1990s Cantillon et al. contend that ‘overall income inequality increased during the 1990’s, and Ireland is one of the most unequal countries in the EU’ (2001:xiv).

### **5.2.5 The national context: Overview of the Celtic Tiger era**

So, while in national terms the 1990s brought dramatic growth and wealth, and indeed while all sectors of society experienced increased income, in relative terms the gap between rich and poor increased, and large numbers of people lived in relative poverty in a country ‘awash with wealth’. Tormey and Haran contend that ‘a substantial proportion of Irish society still lives in relative poverty (which is to say they are excluded from having a standard of living considered the norm for Irish society generally)’ (2003:20). According to Nolan and Maitre, ‘one of the key factors determining how well a household fared over the period was whether its income came predominantly from earnings, self-employment income or social welfare transfers’ (2007:39). Disturbingly, Barnardos, the children’s charity, claim that, ‘the divide between rich and poor has grown considerably because for those reliant on social welfare their increases have not kept pace with increases in wage rates. This means that many families on social welfare or low incomes cannot pay for everyday items without falling into debt’ (2005:5). In their publication, ‘*I’m Still Hungry*’, Barnardos highlight the shameful fact that one in seven children in Ireland live in poverty (ibid:5).

The era of the Celtic Tiger will predominantly be remembered as an era of rapid and unprecedented economic growth. There is no doubt that significant sections of Irish society benefited from this period of economic growth. As Whelan and Layte succinctly put it, ‘the majority of Irish people are in jobs involving better conditions



and prospects than those of their parents' (2007:67). However, there is also compelling evidence that the Celtic Tiger did not have a significant equalizing impact. Whelan et al. offer a theoretical framework which explores the 'multidimensionality of poverty', and explore levels of economic vulnerability. While their analysis concludes with an optimistic stance that the 'levels and depth of deprivation are a good deal more modest than suggested by the radical critics', they do, however, acknowledge that 'Irish society after the Celtic Tiger is characterized by a set of tiered levels of deprivation' (2007:103).

The National Women's Council of Ireland's 1999 report, *'First Hand Experience ... Second Hand Life Women and Poverty'*, also mapped women's experiences of poverty at the dawn of the new millennium. Using a Participatory Learning and Action approach, the voices of ninety three women across five counties were listened to. The overall finding presented 'a picture of women's poverty as an experience in which they are totally immersed and which affects every aspect of their lives. This experience of poverty is diverse, multi-faceted, taking in financial distress, emotional distress, powerlessness and educational disadvantage, and (to a lesser extent) other forms of material deprivation, such as lack of housing and lack of transport' (National Women's Council of Ireland, 1999:31).

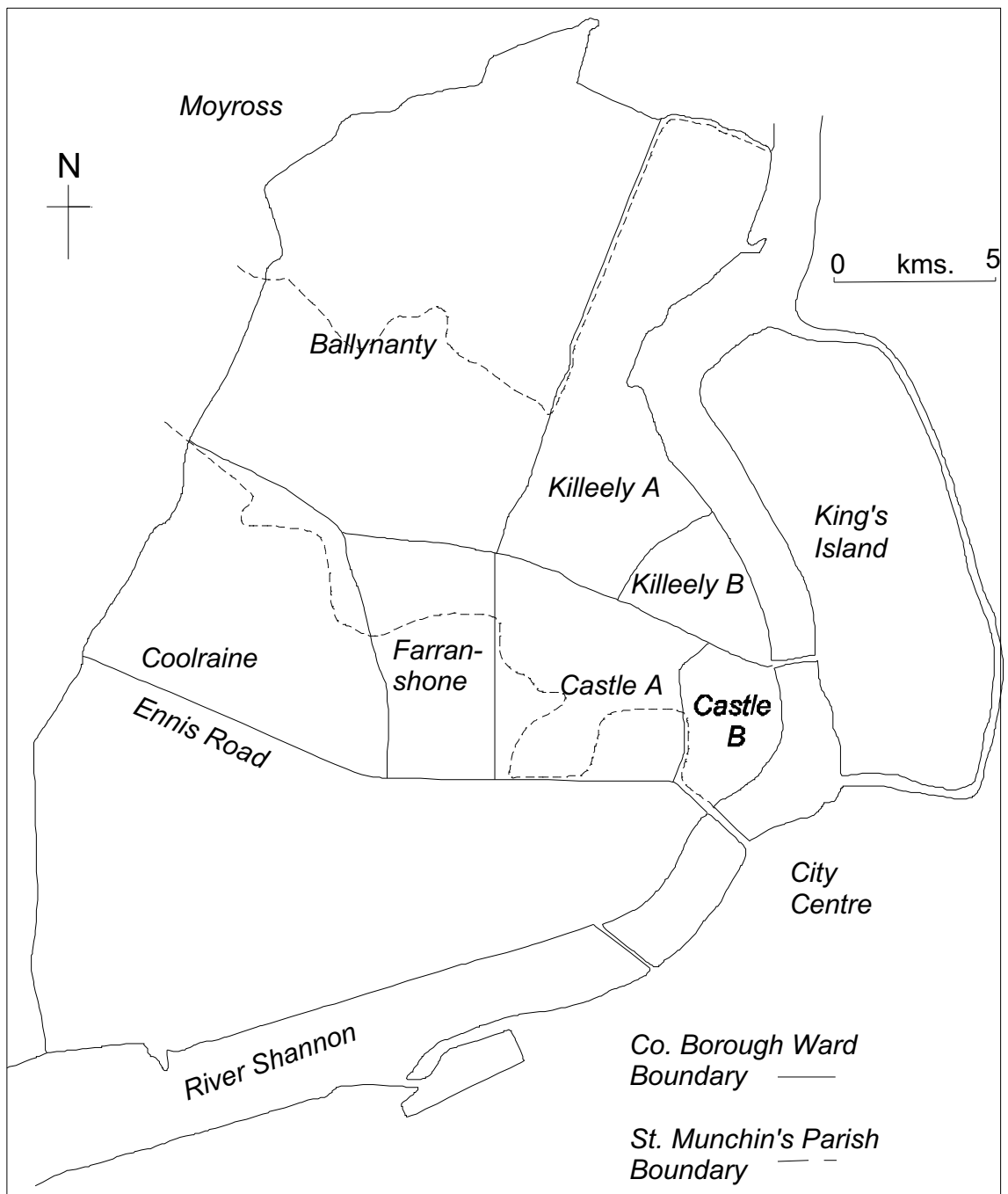
Disturbingly, the voices of the women in the aforementioned report echo the experiences and life descriptions of women Daly describes in the 1980s. While the Celtic Tiger offered the Irish people the opportunity to address issues which contribute to inequality. I believe it will be remembered as the era of missed opportunities in which we might have made significant inroads into addressing the causes and consequences of poverty and inequality. In Chapter Two, 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility', I address the issue of poverty and low income in relation to how they impact on accessibility to learning and engagement with the educational system.

### 5.3 Limerick City

Limerick is the third largest city in Ireland. It is a very old and historic city, and has a long established trading and manufacturing history:

The City of Limerick is located at the lowest bridging point of the River Shannon ... is now the third largest urban area in the state, and the manufacturing, commercial, administrative, and cultural capital of the Mid-West region (Walsh et al., 2001:2).

If one were to analyse a map of Limerick City in terms of housing types, broadly speaking two large sectors of Corporation / Local Authority housing would emerge extending to the north-west and south-east from the city centre. Indeed 'Limerick has one of the highest percentages of public housing among local authority areas in Ireland' (Mc Cafferty and Canny, 2005:13). On the south-eastern side of the city the local authority sector of housing comprises of Garryowen, Janesboro and Kennedy Park, extending into the very large estates of Southill. On the north-western side of the city the local authority sector of housing comprises of St. Mary's Park, parts of Thomondgate, and the entire estates of Kileely, Ballynanty and Moyross. Mc Cafferty describes these sectors of local authority housing as 'corridors of disadvantage' (2005:7), since they are highly marginalised in terms of their socio-economic profiles. The study site is located in Kileely, which is part of the north-western wedge of local authority housing.



**Figure 5.1 Limerick City**

Adapted from Mc Cafferty 'A Profile of St. Munchin's Parish', (1993:4).

## 5.4 The Kileely estate

The Kileely<sup>1</sup> estate, built in the 1940s, is located within the north-western sector of local authority housing in Limerick City. I draw on both quantitative and qualitative data to profile the area in which the study is located. Quantitative data is extrapolated from the 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, and 2002 census in which urban areas are divided into wards for the purpose of statistical analysis. Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS) are made available through the Central Statistics Office (CSO) for each ward. There are 37 wards in Limerick City Borough<sup>2</sup>. I draw on the 1981, 1986, 1991 and 1996, and 2002 SAPS which provide data on the demographic, social, housing, educational, and economic factors which are pertinent to the area of study. The area profile is informed by qualitative data drawn from the extensive primary research carried out for this study. Furthermore, I draw on secondary sources such as published community profiles. The Kileely area is profiled in detail in Appendix C.

**Table 5.1 Number of households in Kileely A 1981-2002**

Year	Number of houses in Kileely A ward	Number of houses in Kileely estate	% of Kileely A ward area representing the kileely estate.
1981	494	368	74%
1986	465	368	79%
1991	453	368	81%
1996	499	368	74%
2002	535	368	69%

While SAPS are a well established, and useful source of information, there are, however, significant limitations associated with their use. The Kileely housing estate, comprising of 368 houses, is located within the Kileely A ward. The Kileely A ward SAPS relate to an area greater in size than the Kileely estate. Table 5.1 provides analysis of the number of households represented within the Kileely A SAPS, and the proportion of those households contained in the Kileely estate. For the five individual census collection years profiled above, the proportion of the Kileely A households representing the Kileely estate ranges from 74% in 1981 and 1996 to 79% in 1986,

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<sup>1</sup> The Kileely estate is officially referred to as Killeely in the census data, however Kileely is the spelling used locally.

<sup>2</sup> Limerick City area is currently defined as Limerick City Borough in the Census data, it was previously known as Limerick County Borough.

81% in 1991 and 69% in 2002. Therefore it is not possible to obtain precise statistical information for this discrete estate. For example in 1981, apart from the Kileely estate itself, the following areas are included within the Kileely A ward, parts of old Thomondgate including Barrack Lane and New Road, as well as the new local authority estate of Park De Valera, and the private housing at Sexton street. In his report on St Munchin's parish, in which Kileely is located, Mc Cafferty cautions the reader on the limitations of using statistical information in isolation, and advocates the use of both qualitative and quantitative data and states that in his experience:

The insights which [these] interviews yielded were invaluable in guiding interpretation of the results from the analysis pointing to areas where the data were possibly misleading or inadequate, and elucidating the processes and mechanisms underlying the static pictures which the statistics paint (1993:2).

The voices of research participants illuminate the statistical data and are built into the comprehensive Kileely profile in Appendix C. Statistical data has further limitations. Mc Cafferty warns of the dangers of 'ecological fallacy' (1993:2), whereby an individual is ascribed the characteristics of the area in which they live. He further cautions the reader to be aware of inferring a causal relationship between phenomena solely on the basis of correlations observed at the level of the ward /area. A further limitation to the usefulness of census statistical data is that the types of information collected differed across census periods. This hindered comparison across time periods. It is most noteworthy in the section dealing with educational attainment.

## **5.5 Location of study site**

The Kileely estate is located in the Kileely A ward within the Parish of St. Munchin. St Munchin's Parish is one of the largest in the city and spans seven wards as well as the District Division of Limerick North Rural in County Limerick (Mc Cafferty, 1993:3). I also make reference to the Castle A and Castle B wards both of which are located within St. Munchin's Parish. According to the census data analysed in this study and others, St. Munchin's parish is very diverse in terms of housing types, age of housing, employment levels, educational attainment, and demographics. The 1998 research report '*Community Profile, St. Munchin's Community Limerick*', compares Kileely A and Kileely B with Castle A and Castle B, all located within St. Munchin's Parish, in terms of population, family status, social class, employment and education. The report concludes that when these two distinct though neighbouring areas are

compared, 'it is easily seen the differences in social class, family status, employment and education in both areas and how all these factors effect each other (1998:54).

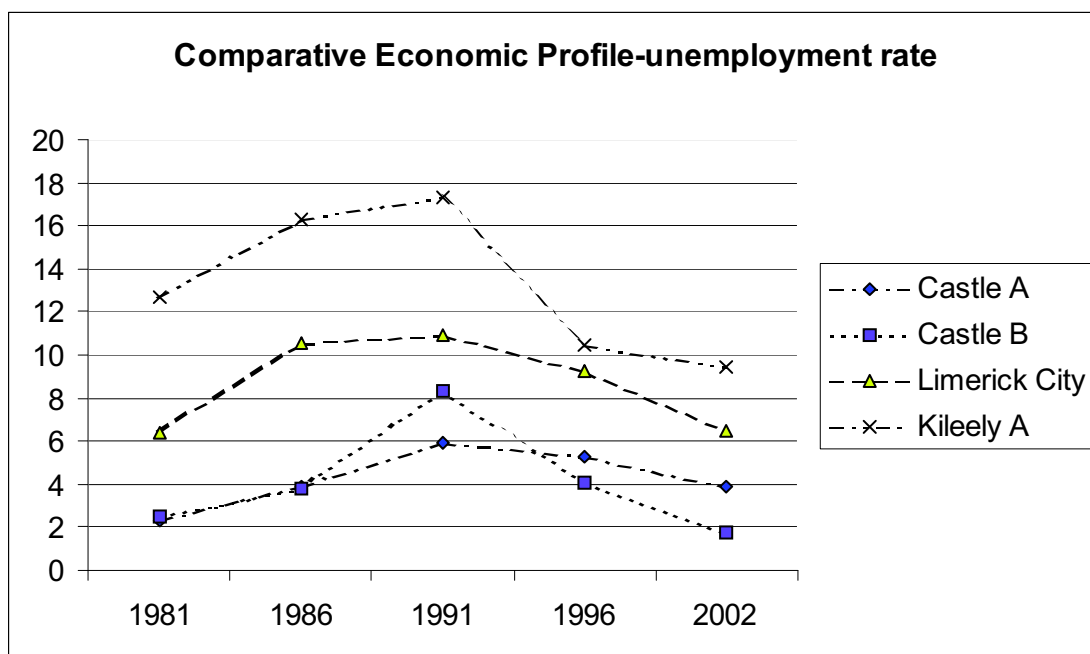
I will now present a brief comparative economic and educational profile of the Kileely A area. This short profile is informed by the SAPS for Kileely A, Castle A and B and Limerick City, thus enabling comparison between wards and the City as a whole. Furthermore, analysis of census data provides a means to investigate specific characteristics within a discrete area across time e.g. unemployment or school leaving age can be compared across time to decipher trends or patterns.

Unemployment, poverty, and quality of life are closely associated. Kileely is a local authority housing estate and according to Nolan et al. 'high risks of poverty are associated with being a local authority tenant, and between 1987 and 1994 the level of risk for such households increased significantly' (1998:97). The implications of living in poverty are graphically profiled in Chapter Two 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility' and indeed poverty is a recurring theme throughout this work.

My analysis of the census data highlights the significant differences between Kileely A and the neighbouring wards of Castle A and Castle B, and indeed Limerick City as a whole in relation to their economic, social class, economic dependency rate and educational profiles. While the advent of the Celtic Tiger decreased the levels of unemployment, in real terms for Kileely A the levels of unemployment have remained significantly higher than in neighbouring wards and in Limerick City as a whole.

## **5.6 Comparative economic profile for Kileely A, Castle A and B and Limerick City**

In this section I compare the unemployment rate for Kileely A with the neighbouring wards of Castle A and B, and with the city as a whole with reference to the 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996 and 2002 census data.



**Figure 5.2 Comparative economic profile-unemployment rate**

In 1981 Kileely A suffered disproportionate levels of unemployment in comparison with neighbouring wards and with Limerick city as a whole. The 1981 census data records an unemployment level of 12.71% for persons over 15 years old for the Kileely A area. The corresponding figures for the neighbouring wards of Castle A and Castle B, are 2.28% and 2.54% respectively, while the unemployment figure for Limerick City was 6.43%. Kileely A again showed a disproportionate level of unemployment in the 1986 census. In Kileely A 16.27% of the population were recorded as unemployed in comparison with 3.87% for Castle A and 3.78% for Castle B. Limerick City recorded an unemployment rate of 10.51 for that period. According to the 1991 census Kileely A again suffered a disproportionate level of unemployment. The 1991 census records an unemployment level of 17.34% for Kileely A. The corresponding figures for Castle A and Castle B are 5.96% and 8.31% respectively, while the unemployment figure for Limerick City as a whole was 10.96%. By 1996 the unemployment rate in Kileely A had decreased to 10.48%, the corresponding figures for Castle A and B were 5.25% and 4.04% respectively, while Limerick City had an unemployment rate of 9.29%. The 2002 census records an unemployment level of 9.47% for Kileely A. The corresponding figure for Castle A and Castle B were 3.87% and 1.79%. The overall level for Limerick City was 6.52% at that time.

The census data above covers a period of over twenty years. The foregoing statistics show that a person living in the Kileely A ward had a significantly higher risk of being unemployed in comparison with the neighbouring wards and indeed with the city as a whole throughout all of the twenty year period. While the unemployment rate for all areas peaked in the mid 1980s and declined steadily through the early and mid nineties and the early years of the millennium, Kileely A retains its negative profile in comparison to other areas.

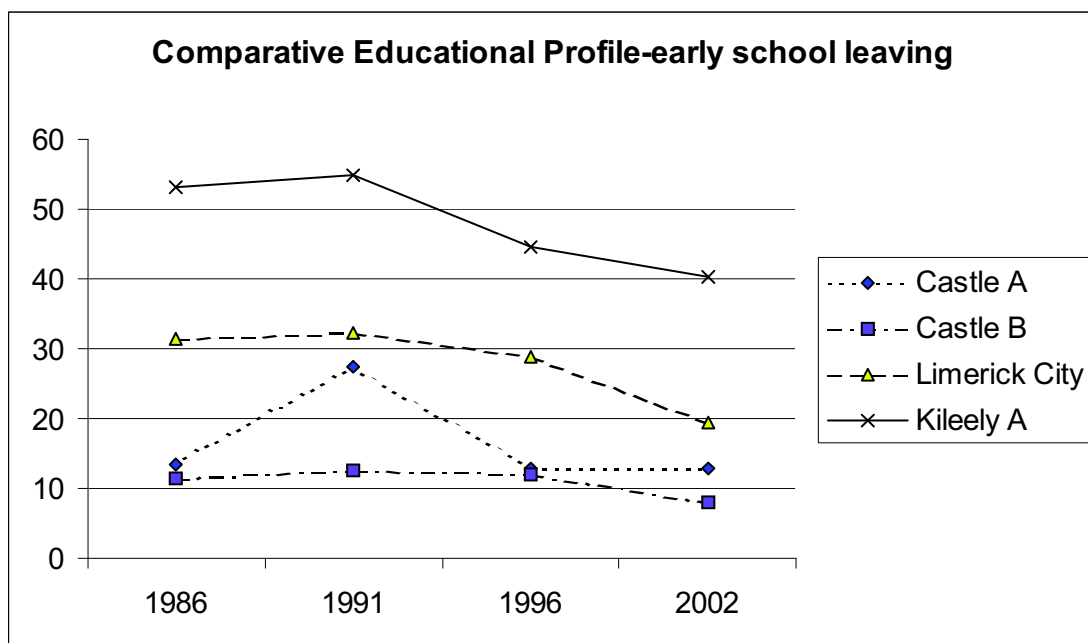
### **5.7 Comparative education profile for Kileely A, Castle A and B and Limerick City**

In this section I compare the education profile of Kileely A with the neighbouring wards of Castle A and Castle B and with Limerick City as a whole. Drawing on five consecutive censuses between 1981 and 2002 I profile the proportion of residents who left school at or under fifteen years old. School leaving age impacts on a number of areas, including age of entry into the labour force and the impact of the educational attainment of parents in relation to their capacity to support their children's educational journey. A person without qualifications enters the labour force at a disadvantage in comparison with persons who have attained recognised qualifications such as state exams or other recognised certification.

Educational attainment and participation levels are low within my study area.

According to the 1981 census, 32% of adults aged 15-29 residing in the Kileely A ward left school at primary level. Disturbingly, 49% of adults in the ward aged 30-44 left school at primary level. Later census data differs from the 1981 data and profiles the age at which people ceased education as opposed to the level at which people ceased formal education.





**Figure 5.3 Comparative educational profile – early school leaving**

According to the 1986 census, 53.20% of the population of Kileely A ward aged over 15 left school at or under 15 years old. The corresponding figures for Castle A and Castle B were 13.29 % and 11.55% respectively. The corresponding figure for Limerick City was 31.43%. The 1991 data records that 55% of people aged over 15 years living in Kileely A left school at or under 15 years of age while the corresponding figures for Castle A and Castle B were 27.30% and 12.69% respectively, with Limerick City as a whole recording a level of 32.38%. According to the 1996 census, 44.48% of the Kileely A population left school at or before 15 years old, the corresponding figures for Castle A and Castle B were 12.74 % and 12.11% respectively. The figure for Limerick City for that period was 28.73%. Finally, according to the 2002 census the Kileely A area education profile has not changed significantly. My analysis of the census data reveals that 40.30 % of the Kileely A population left school before or at 15 years old. The corresponding figures for the neighbouring wards of Castle A and Castle B were 12.85% and 8.03 % respectively, while the figure for Limerick City was 19.51%. While the census data give us information on the age people left school, we do not have data on the age profile of respondents, therefore it is difficult to know whether the person who left school on or before 15 is twenty years old or forty years old. However, it does give us an insight into degree of human and educational capital within an area.

## 5.8 Evidence from independent reports

A number of independent reports profile the study area and Limerick City during the timeframe of this study. These reports provide further evidence of the context and conditions in which KCP evolved. I will briefly refer to Mc Cafferty's report of 1993, Healy's report of 1998, Ryan's report of 2000, and finally three reports published in 2005, all of which serve to contextualise the study site and the era in which KCP evolved.

In the conclusion to his 1993 report, '*A Profile of St. Munchin's Parish*', in which Kileely is located, Mc Cafferty compares St Munchin's parish with the Limerick City Borough (1993:34). He acknowledges the significant differences which exists in the rate of lone parent families, the rate of marital separation, and unemployment between the Parish of St. Munchin's, and the city as a whole. Furthermore, he draws attention to the internal differences which exist between the various communities which constitute the parish of St. Munchin's. He refers to the areas of Kileely and Ballynanty, both local authority housing estates, and compares them to Farranshone, a private housing area:

[Kileely and Ballynanty] have especially high rates of lone parenthood and marital separation, with Farranshone at or below the city norm, and below that of the parish. On unemployment, the pattern is even clearer, with the rate of unemployment in the public housing estates ranging between 3.6 and 4.7 times the rate of Farranshone ... Because most of the population in the parish is located in the Corporation estates, the incidence of problems such as lone parenthood and unemployment is greatest in these area. Thus 85% of lone parents and 94% of the unemployed are located in Ballynanty, Kileely, and Thomondgate. This public/private contrast reflects the situation in the city as a whole (1993:35).

In Healy's 1998 PAUL publication, '*Life on Low Income*', Limerick women from six Limerick City communities including the one this study is located in, share their experiences of living in poverty. One hundred and sixty eight women participated in the research and used terms such as 'desperate' and 'terrible', to describe their lives' (1998: 3). They described their lives as a constant struggle, effectively they were the 'managers of poverty' (ibid: 3). These women, many of whom live in debt, describe shopping for cheaper food, sitting in cold homes, constantly worrying about money, and consequently, suffering health problems such as stress and depression. They also spoke of the social isolation, being house bound and not being able to afford a night out. The consequences of living on low income are both immediate and long-term.

Healy's research participants acknowledged the opportunities for adult education which existed in their communities but reported that the energy required to 'cope with bills and with life', leaves little energy to engage with learning (ibid: 14).

In 2002 St. Munchin's Family Resource centre located in the neighbouring estate of Ballynanty commissioned community based research into the factors influencing educational disadvantage which also sought to identify barriers to fuller participation in education. The research, *'Through the Gates, From Primary to Secondary'* was carried out in three local authority housing estates within St. Munchin's parish, Kileely, Ballynanty and Thomondgate. The research project surveyed 112 parents and 323 young people. The research found that 71% of parents interviewed had no educational qualifications, a staggering 53% had not attended Secondary school and only 6% of those who did attend Secondary school completed their Leaving Certificate. The report notes that 'the lack of parents' experience of second level has been a huge barrier to effective involvement in the pupils' progression through the school system' (Ryan, 2000:6.2.1). In Chapter Two 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility' I defined human capital as a resource which 'resides in people's heads' (Portes, 1998:7). This resource is manifest through the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Parents who left school at an early age do not have the experiences of attending second level, and while they may have high aspirations for their children, they may be poorly placed to implement them.

Finally, three reports, published in 2005 draw on diverse data sources and therefore provide an insight into circumstances within the localized area. Firstly, Mc Cafferty and Canny drew on Limerick City Council rent assessment records and on interview data to construct a profile of tenants and estates within the Limerick City area, as well as reviewing existing research. They conclude that 'while not all local authority estates are the same ... the similarities in general outweigh these differences, and studies conducted in various localities/estates have repeatedly pointed to a number of characteristic problems' (Mc Cafferty and Canny: 2005:23). They go on to list the problems as; high rates of educational disadvantage, high levels of welfare dependency, a greater reliance on public amenities, a high incidence of neighbourhood problems, and quality of life impairment due to anti-social behaviour. Secondly, *'Reading the Future: Literacy Needs of Adults in St. Munchin's parish'*, surveyed the literacy levels of adults over the age of 18 years living in local authority

estates within the parish. The report found that '49.6% of respondents left school either at or before the age of 15 years. A comparison with the 2002 Census results for the state as a whole shows that the proportion of those who left school at or before 15 years of age is remarkably high among the St. Munchin's Parish sample' (Nolan et al. 2005:18). Finally, Mc Cafferty's 2005 report '*Limerick Profile of a Changing City*', highlights the fact that 'despite the economic growth of the late 1990s, social exclusion remains a major problem in the Limerick urban area' (2005:7). He draws our attention to educational attainment, with particular reference to the relationship between education and employment. He identifies Kileely as one of the areas exhibiting poor educational attainment and participation. He contends that educational attainment 'strongly influences occupational status, occupation in turn is used to determine the individual's social class; and consequently the geographical pattern of social class corresponds closely to that of educational attainment' (2005: 45). Educational attainment has a knock on effect on many aspects of life.

All of the reports above combined with the earlier description of the study area present a profile of a deeply marginalised city. This study site, located in a 'corridor of disadvantage' has not benefited proportionately from the opportunities generated by the Celtic Tiger economy.

## **5.9 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter, augmented by Appendix C, describes the physical, social, economic, and educational context in which the project originated in the mid eighties and developed through the nineties and the early years of the new millennium. The profile that emerges portrays an area of high unemployment and poor retention within the educational system. The appendix enriches this profile by drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data.

Indeed, there is no doubt that the Celtic Tiger brought increased wealth and employment, and raised the living standards of many within Ireland. However, much has yet to be understood in terms of how a country 'awash with money', did not manage to 'raise all boats', as the tide of wealth washed over our country. But then, you need to have a boat in order for it to be raised. Many communities, families, and individuals were experiencing extremely low level of economic, cultural, human, and

social capital prior to this economic growth. This affected their capacity to take advantage of the opportunities which the Celtic Tiger brought.

This chapter profiled the context in which KCP evolved. Over this twenty year period KCP evolved to bring educational and social learning opportunities to all who engaged with it. Chapter Seven, 'Did Kileely Community Project Make a Difference?' profiles the impact of KCP and reveals the potential for growth and development even against a backdrop of poverty and unemployment.



**CHAPTER SIX**

**JOURNEY OF HOPE: TRANSFERENCE, TRANSITION, AND  
TRANSFORMATION**





## 6. JOURNEY OF HOPE: TRANSFERENCE, TRANSITION, AND TRANSFORMATION

### 6.1 Introduction: Hope as facilitator of change

*With no maps to guide us we steered our own course  
We rode out the storm when the winds were gale force  
We sat out the doldrums in patience and hope  
Working together we learned how to cope*  
(Johnny Duhan)

To act and live with hope demands we believe in the innate potential of all human beings to critique and act upon our worlds. Fundamentally, ‘the person who hopes *believes* that the future is open’ (Godfrey, 1987:215). The first stage of living with hope ‘implicitly involves adopting a critical reflective attitude towards prevailing circumstances’ (Halpin, 2003: 15). It demands developing a critical capacity to reason, investigate, and understand. For it is only as ‘we know how we have been shaped by the structures of power in which we live, can we become shapers’ (Starhawk, 1987:8). The second requirement is the belief that as human beings, we are capable of changing ourselves and ultimately our worlds, what Sanders defines as our ways of ‘seeing and thinking, and living’ (1998: 186). Field Belenky et al. conceptualise change as a transformative process: from ‘passivity to action, from self as static to self as becoming, from silence to a protesting inner voice and infallible gut’ (1986:54). Elshtain connects this two-fold process of critical thought and action to power, and translates this into a dialogue on hope stating:

What images of power, then, locate us as beings who are called to reflection and action, being receptive to others yet firm in our sense of ourselves? There is a lot about being human that is messy and uncontrolled, helpless before the wintry blasts, but there is also something about us that searches for reason and meaning and requires action. Our understanding of power must grasp the complexities of our all-too-human nature (1992:122).

Hope is embedded in critical thought and action. According to Ryan, hope is actualised within the adult education world in which ‘radical adult education is underpinned by the idea that change is possible’ (2001:22). It is my contention that hope is actualised through the growth, development, and impact of KCP. Indeed, according to Florio-Ruane hope can be actualised when we ‘risk telling new stories in and by many voices’ (1997:160).

Change is mediated through change agents who encounter historical, social, cultural, and personal barriers in our quest to create a more acceptable reality. According to Palmer fear constitutes one of the most compelling barriers to change (1998:36). Halpin conceptualises such barriers as cynicism, fatalism, relativism, fundamentalism, and traditionalism (2003:18-23). In the unravelling, re-visioning, and rebuilding there is uncertainty. But, fortuitously, uncertainty 'is where the imagination finds wings' (Gitlin and Peck, 2005:4).

What then is the source of this metamorphic energy which drives the change process? I believe the impetus for change is nurtured by reason, hope, imagination, love, anger, and ultimately relationship. By relationship I mean our understanding of ourselves in relation to others, whether we 'see big' or whether we 'see small' (Greene:1995). Conscious of the latent power of the imagination, Greene argues for the development of a social imagination, conceptualised as 'the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools' (1995: 5). She advocates 'utopian thinking', which 'refuses mere compliance, that looks down the roads not yet taken to the shapes of a more fulfilling social order, to more vibrant ways of being in the world (ibid:5). Metamorphic energy resides in hope, love, anger, and in the capacity to imagine a better world.

Freire, champion of critical dialogue and transformative processes, contends that 'man's ontological vocation (as he calls it) is to be a subject who acts upon and transforms his world' (1972:12). Freire believes that we are 'capable of looking critically at (our) own world in a dialogical encounter with others' (ibid: 12). It is in this dialogical encounter that the seeds of hope are sewn. In his recent research Halpin uncovered a significant gap in the literature in the area of hope in education. He did however find significant agreement in the work of Ludema, Tiger, and Marcel in relation to defining the characteristics of hope (2003: 15). Like Freire, they concur that hope is relational with a high degree of mutuality. Fundamentally they contend that hope is 'only possible at the level of us' (Marcel quoted in Halpin 2003:16). Halpin's proposal that mutuality is 'both a source for and potential outcome of hope' (2003: 16) fosters an understanding of hope as an energy force which energises, bonds, and sustains people to move beyond the unacceptable reality to become agents of change. Sanders captures this dynamic when he quoted a personal friend who theorised that 'memory grips the past and hope grips the future' (1998: 190).

To live permanently in a state of hope is neither realistic nor indeed humanly possible. Mc Laren contends that 'Freire understood that while we often abandon hope, we are never abandoned by hope' (1999:54). He contends that 'this is because hope is forever engraved in the human heart and inspires us to reach beyond the carnal limits of our species' being' (ibid: 54). Kozol, a researcher whose work is embedded in the lives of marginalised youth, acknowledges the innate nature of hope. He finds hope in 'the words and prayers of children and the spiritual resilience of so many of their mothers and grandmothers ... in the very young whose luminous capacity for tenderness and love and a transcendent sense of faith in human decency give reason for hope' (1995:xiv). I hear strong echoes of hope in Elshtain's work when she speaks of women's 'openness to new beginnings even under conditions of hardship and privation, terror and torture', and she contends that this openness has 'daily renewed the world, making possible future beginnings' (1992: 122). Thus hope is found in the most unlikely places, in the hearts of people who have good reason to abandon hope. But hope, of its nature, defies logic and answers to a different set of principles; that is the belief in the capacity of human beings to alter and improve our worlds.

This imagining of possibilities or 'dreaming' is a mechanism for re-imagining the world not fleeing it (Freire, 1992:109), and when this re-imagining occurs in relationship through dialogue it creates a 'climate of hope' (ibid: 176). According to Freire it is in the process of critical reflection and dialogue that the poor dream their own dreams. Conversely, in an historical context, according to Mc Laren, Freire believed that 'the dreams of the poor were always dreamed for them by distant others who were removed from the daily struggles of the working class and were either unable or unwilling to recognize the dreams that burned in the habitats of their hearts' (1999: 50). Greene is also invested in the power of dialogue. She contends that 'reshaping of imagination may be released through many sorts of dialogue', be it among youth from different cultures, people who have come together to problem solve, or activists' (1995:5).

### 6.1.1 Hope and education

Where does hope fit within the context of our dialogue on education? Hope provides the energy to operationalise the potential of education to transform and to empower. As Chapter Two, 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility' demonstrates, successful educational outcomes correlate with enhanced quality of life. Chapter Two also problematises the role of teachers as agents of change and hope. According to hooks 'education is the ticket. Without it you stay in the same place' (2003:124). Teachers play a key role in the educational transformational process. The teachers' philosophical stance in relation to their role and in relation to their aspirations for the students is central to this discussion, as is their relationships with students and their pedagogical tool kit. The role of teachers in the transformation process has already been discussed in section 2.5.2.5. Freire proposes that 'one of the tasks for the progressive educator ... is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be' (1992: 3). According to Greene, when dialogue is 'activated in classrooms, even the young are stirred to reach out on their own initiatives. Apathy and indifference are likely to give way as images of what might be arise' (1995:5). Hope is a dynamic and potent force.

If hope is such a potent force, what then are the factors that nurture and activate it? Freire identified 'rage and love' as key actors in nurturing hope (1992: 4). I believe that a combination of rage and love does indeed nurture hope, and plays a fundamental role in teaching and learning. hooks too explores the theme of love in education and places it central to the act of teaching. She cautions that 'to speak of love in relation to teaching is already to engage in a dialogue that is taboo' (2003: 127). The discourse of love, fear, hope, and anger, needs to permeate the educational debate so that it can inform, energise, and guide us to find ways to identify, and address the learning needs of adults and children.

I remember the deep anger I felt as I thought about how the educational system rejected rather than nurtured our young people. I remember the frustration of working in a community served by a high turnover of social workers. I remember the outrage I felt visiting third level institutions with fountains, when my beloved school building was poorly resourced and insecure against rodents and vandalism. Love played a central role in my work. It fuelled my passion to try to make a difference. Palmer also

contends that love has an essential part to play in educational change since ‘any loveless enterprise is likely to be pathological’ (1998: 90). One of my interview participants, now a successful young woman in her mid twenties, spoke of how she perceived my relationship with the young people in the ‘Three O’Clock School’. This confident young woman paused and looked me straight in the eye. As she sat comfortably in the Principal’s office and mused about her ‘Three O’Clock School’ experiences and relationships, she endeavoured to understand why KCP had such an impact on young lives:

The interest has to genuinely be there. I think you had the interest in your heart. Otherwise don't bother like! It's not fair like! I remember you bringing us out to your home like. Do you remember that? I remember that. Even that was, that wasn't just that you were getting paid to do a job. That was putting heart and soul into it like. You cared about us. You loved us. That was a different thing ('Three O'Clock School' participant no. 8).

Indeed, the interview process provided precious fora to affirm past emotional relationships and acknowledge the respect, love, and concern that permeated relationships. De los Reyes and Gozemba whose research was grounded in diverse, effective, successful educational sites, found teachers who shared ‘love, respect and trust with their students, and their bold act in doing so elicits the same response from their students’ (2002:20).

Finally, Fine and Weis offer a word of caution to researchers whose work is located in challenging contexts. They highlight the researchers’ responsibility in representing ‘the pain and suffering in communities and the incredible resilience and energy that percolates’ (1996: 270). They recognise the tension between ‘recognising historically oppressed groups as victimised and damaged *or* resilient and strong’ (ibid: 270). They reject simple stories of ‘discrimination and victimisation’ without evidence of ‘resistance, resilience, or agency’, as well as the ‘dreary’ and ‘increasingly popular stories of individual heroes who thrive despite the obstacles, denying the burdens of surviving’ (ibid: 270). The journey of hope is at once raw, sensitive, messy, painful, joyful, aspirational, and resilient.

I am privileged to have been part of a change journey which metamorphosed a small primary school into a community learning centre, Kileely Community Project (KCP). The change process was facilitated through dialogue and activated through hope,

commitment and love. I experienced first hand how dialogue is indeed the seedbed of transformation, empowerment, and the imagining of possibilities. Indeed, the research process itself was infused with hope as participants spoke of their transformative experiences and their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the future.

In this chapter I describe the activities of KCP, track their holistic development, and map the relationship between various services located in the school over a twenty-year period. It is a story of *transference*, where power and authority traditionally embodied in the person of the Principal, was shared with a committee of community activists who along with myself were pioneering an educational initiative. It is a story of *transition* as together we embraced new roles, as the school function changed and as the relationship between the school, homes, and community evolved. It is a story of *transformation* for all stakeholders including school personnel, community activists, children and adult learners, who were all engaged in a process that impacted on them personally and on their school, homes, and community. It is a journey where dreams were forged and re forged, stories told and retold, and possibilities imagined. It is a journey of hope and imagination. I do not intend to romanticise this journey as, like all journeys involving change, it brought personal and systemic challenges. This journey was fuelled by anger, love, and hope, and a stubborn commitment to bring about change.

## **6.2 The three stages of the development of Kileely Community Project**

In this chapter I profile the growth of KCP which began ‘at a time when there was very little funding for community education ... and continued to grow at a time when there has been much greater political awareness of the need for adult basic education’ (Statutory agency interviewee no. 1). Stage one relates to the initial stage, ‘Tentative steps’ from 1985 to 1991. This was described as a time when ‘the school was dark, and people were poor and there were no cars pulling up at the school’ (teachers focus group). This was a time when ‘the unemployment was just unbelievable and there was an atmosphere of depression’ (mature adult learner and committee member no.1). Stage two, ‘Dancing with pride’ relates to the mid stage, from 1991 to 1998. During this stage school enrolment increased and the building was renovated. Finally, stage three, ‘Striding with confidence’ relates to the contemporary stage, from 1998 to 2005. During this phase the school grew to an eight-teacher school and prefabricated buildings were erected in the grounds. While to some degree this subdivision is

artificial, the three stages have distinct features, and this sub-division enables reflection on the growth and development of KCP over this time period. I profile my role in relation to KCP and the school, the growth and development of programmes, the resources available, the status of the school, and the role of KCP management committee during the three stages of development. The evolution of KCP must be understood in the context of the economic, social, and educational conditions in which it evolved and grew. Chapter Five, 'Area Profile', starkly profiles these conditions. In order to provide a backdrop for the development of KCP I will firstly describe the host school in terms of its physical structure, enrolment, and staffing.

### **6.3 School Profile**

In this section the host school is described in terms of its physical layout, enrolment, and staffing during all three stages of development. The school building, enrolment, and staffing changed dramatically throughout this twenty-year period.

#### **6.3.1 Physical layout**

The host school, an infant school<sup>1</sup> in which the project is located was built in 1945. It has five classrooms, rooms 1-5, and two annexes<sup>2</sup>, one on each end of the building, (Appendix D, Floor plan of host school). Each annex originally contained a cloakroom, washroom, and toilet area. Also, each annex had a door opening to the yard at the rear of the school. One of the original cloakrooms was converted to a kitchen, (room 6), the other subdivided to create a crèche and remedial room, (rooms 7,8). Sinks were installed in the toilet areas and the two washrooms were converted to offices.

##### **6.3.1.1 Stage 1: Tentative steps, from 1985 to 1991**

During the mid eighties local residents and tutors had concerns for the viability of the school which they perceived was 'going downhill', both in terms of its physical structure and its student population. In many ways the school mirrored the economic and social climate, which was depressed and hopeless:

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<sup>1</sup> Infant schools offer a three-year cycle, junior infants, senior infants and first class.

<sup>2</sup> The classrooms are numbered 1 to 5, and the former cloakrooms in each annexe, are numbered 6 and 7 on the ground floor plan, Appendix D.

It was a depressing time in a depressing area. A school that was going down hill. It was two rooms looking towards one with declining population student-wise. That's my attitude out here, "How long will this place stay open"? So that would be my description of the place in the 80s when I came out here. (Tutor no. 1).

During this initial stage, the school was 'locked and empty' after school hours. It was in a state of physical decline due to age and vandalism. Each Monday morning I arrived to find broken windows and graffiti after the weekend's anti social behaviour. The school yard was littered with debris from weekend drinking parties:

The school was plagued by vandalism, windows broken, graffiti on walls etc., as the school premises were easily accessible to children of all sizes. Temptation was great as the school was locked and empty, and any 'irregular activity' could be conducted at the rear, as the area was not overlooked (Teacher no. 5).

During this phase the school had empty classrooms as a result of decreasing enrolment. The Principal made these rooms available to KCP. I approached Thomond College, University of Limerick, with a proposal that their final year woodwork students might build educational equipment which could be used both by our school, and by KCP. I worked with the college on the design of the educational equipment. The equipment was installed in room 3, which was designated 'the playroom'. Thomond college students created a wonderland of floor and wall mounted games, designed to build mathematical and literacy skills, as well as team building and collaboration skills. They installed a gigantic castle complete with a slide, fireman's pole and tunnel. In all they built twenty-five pieces of educational equipment. This room brought great joy to the children enrolled in the school and to the children attending the 'Three O'Clock School'. It provided a stimulating and fun learning environment. Furthermore, in the process of doing this research I discovered that it also served as a motivator for school attendance.

### **6.3.1.2 Stage 2: Dancing with pride, from 1991 to 1998**

In stage 2, 'Dancing with Pride', (1991-1998), we renovated the school building. On foot of a successful grant application to the Department of Education, we replaced the flat roof which covered the corridor and two annexes, replaced the toilets and the windows, fenced the yard, put in new external doors, rewired the building, relocated the oil tank, and also laid new floor covering on the corridors and toilet areas. Furthermore, we installed new classroom furniture. The physical building was transformed. It became less prone to vandalism due to the extended use of the school



after official school hours, and to the protective railing<sup>3</sup> which we had installed. This physical transformation was a statement of intent, a beacon of hope. We reclaimed the physical building in tandem with re-energising the school and developing KCP.

### **6.3.1.3 Stage 3: Striding with confidence, from 1998 to 2005**

During the contemporary stage, ‘Striding with Confidence’, 1998 to 2005, two prefabricated buildings (prefabricated building 1, 2), were erected at the side of the school to meet the accommodation requirements of the host school. The fencing was also extended to protect these new buildings, (Appendix E, Site map of host school).

The interview participants were very aware of the decline and regeneration of the school during the lifetime of this project. There is strong consensus that the regeneration of the school is linked to the developments within the project and to the growth in ownership and pride by people within the community. This is examined in more detail in Chapter Seven, ‘Did Kileely Community Project Make a Difference?’

### **6.3.2 School enrolment**

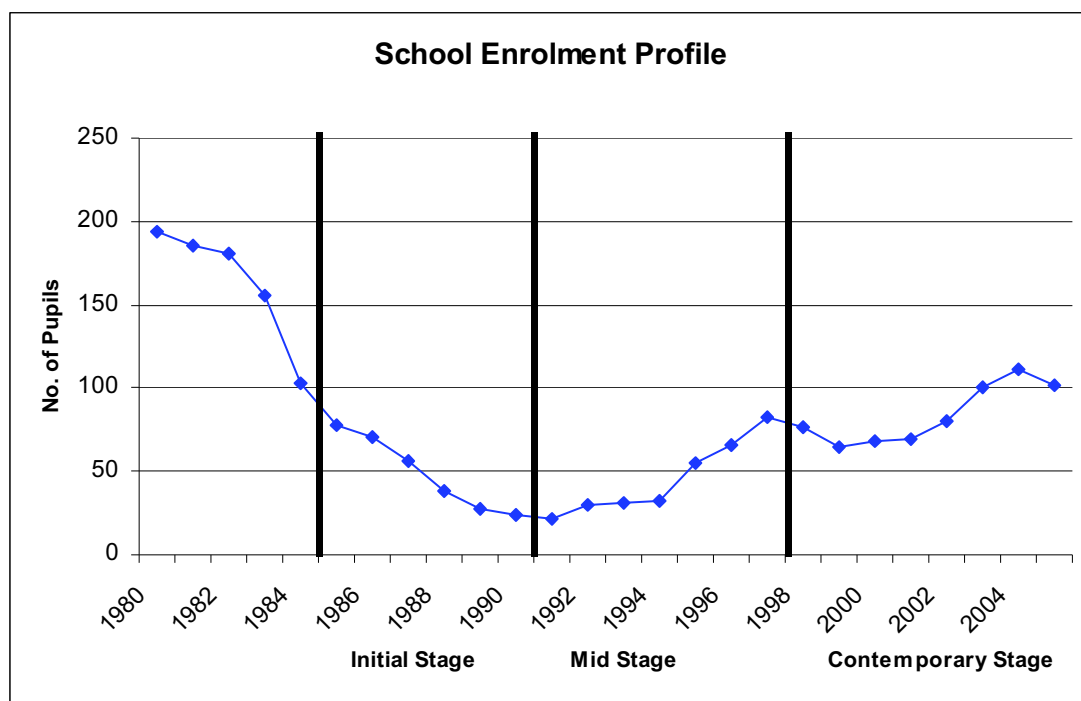
School enrolment was in decline during the initial stage, of the project. The neighbouring local authority estate of Moyross did not have its own primary school until 1984, and many students came to the host school from that estate in the early and mid 1980s. Also, during this phase there were fewer children of school-going age in the immediate vicinity of the school. Enrolment continued to decline until there was only one teacher on staff by 1990. By 1993, enrolment had begun to increase, and the school had become a two-teacher school. While the school inspectorate report from 1993 acknowledges the dramatic decrease in enrolment, which had occurred since the previous Department of Education report, it also acknowledges the ‘new lease of life’, the school was experiencing in the early 1990s:

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<sup>3</sup> The school is located on a large green site. This is the only green area in the community. We decided not to erect a perimeter fence, as we did not want the building to look like a prison, but to fence the yard area instead. After all, we were trying to increase access to school based services, not to deter it. This suggestion came from one of the men working on the FÁS CE Scheme in the school and proved to be very successful. It deterred vandalism and created a safe enclosed space for children to play. It also made the school grounds safer for adults attending night classes. We also installed external lights in the two front doors which created safer night access for adults and deterred vandalism.

At the time of the last report on this school there was a staff of six teachers. Since then there has been a dramatic fall in the enrolment. All but one of the teachers then in the school have either transferred to other schools or have retired ... It seems as if this school has been given a new lease of life. While the numbers will never be large enough to fill the building once again, a viable future seems in prospect. Much of the credit for this must go to the new Principal, not only for her work since becoming Principal, but also for her years of social/educational work among the parents of the area.

The following graph tracks the enrolment prior to, and during the three development stages of KCP. The school enrolment declined in the initial stage as Moyross now had its own primary school, increased in the mid stage, due to increased confidence in the school and the demographics of the surrounding area, and had a more modest increase in the contemporary stage.



**Figure 6.1 School enrolment profile**

### 6.3.3 Staffing

There were six teachers on staff in 1980. This had decreased to a one teacher school by 1990, and continued as a one teacher school for two years, (the last year of stage 1, and first year of phase 2). During stages 2 and 3 the staffing increased steadily as enrolment grew, pupil teacher ratio decreased, and additional posts including Giving

Children an Even Break, (GCEB),<sup>4</sup> and Resource Teacher for Travellers (RTT)<sup>5</sup> posts, were sanctioned. In 2005, at the end of stage 3, there were eight teachers on staff.

## **6.4 Kileely Community Project**

The growth and development of KCP is divided into three chronological stages spanning a twenty-year period from 1985 to 2005. This section profiles the developments that took place within KCP during each of those stages.

### **6.4.1 Stage 1: Tentative steps, from 1985 to 1991**

The initial stage charts developments from 1985 to 1991. This section explores developments within KCP designed to meet adult and children's learning needs. It also defines the support structures which enabled the effective development and delivery of services.

#### **6.4.1.1 Stage 1: Adult provision**

In 1985, facing deployment to another school due to decreasing enrolment, I took a career break from teaching in the host school, and began a formal process of working with parents in the host school. As a teacher in the school, I had previously worked informally with parents, supporting them in their efforts to support their own children's learning. In 1985, having 'relieved' myself of teaching duties, I began to develop my work with adults and subsequently with children. I designed a series of sessions, 'Parents and Children Learning Together', aimed at building parents' skills as proactive teachers of their children, (Appendix F: Parents and Children Learning Together Programme). I consulted with parents and teachers in devising the programme. Shortly after giving up my teaching post, I stood in the school corridor a few mornings per week, met parents as they dropped their children to school, and encouraged them to attend my class. The school supported this new venture by providing a room, resources, and also by encouraging parents to attend. The

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<sup>4</sup> 'The aim of the Giving Children an Even Break Programme is to tackle educational disadvantage in selected primary schools', Department of Education and Science website, [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie), (accessed 21 February, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Resource teacher for travellers posts are allocated subject to the number of children from the travelling community enrolled in the school.

programme ran one morning per week, and was designed as an eight-week programme.

Adult education provision began with the 'Parents and Children Learning Together' programme which ran on Wednesday mornings. It was the first adult education class in the area, and was well attended. In my former remedial room, parents, anxious to support their children's learning, sat on old wooden school desks and discussed educational, local, and personal issues. The programme reflected topics identified by parents, as well as topics based directly on the Primary School Curriculum. Parents were actively involved in practical activities, question and answer sessions, and in identifying topics they wished to have addressed. In this dynamic learning environment parents reflected on their prior learning experiences, which included their school experiences, as well as their experiences as parents of children of school-going age. I clearly remember one mother speaking of her aspirations to be a nurse. However, her 'spelling came against' her. She 'swore that her children would never go through what she went through'. Parents discussed their experiences of helping their children with homework, and highlighted the challenge of supporting them as they progressed through the Primary and Secondary school system. They raised topics such as behaviour management, resources, learning difficulties, and teacher accessibility.

The deliberately informal atmosphere of the class promoted on-going dialogue between participants. At the end of each session we had a cup of tea and a chat together and in this inclusive non judgemental setting adult learners discussed their own learning needs, and indeed voiced their aspirations for themselves and their children. This was the seedbed for future developments, where women 'got used to' gathering together to learn, to talk, and to plan. On one occasion I handed a woman a mug of tea and she replied, 'Thanks Ann, that's the first mug of tea I've been handed in eighteen years'. Not only were the women learning, but I as their tutor was learning how to engage, interact, listen, learn, and share my knowledge. One of the tutors involved in the early years remarked that this group enjoyed having someone to care for them, who was not 'talking down to them'. Not only were these women engaged in learning how to support their children's learning, they were also for the first time coming together as a group of learners, as women, as mothers, as neighbours, and increasingly as friends in an atmosphere which nurtured support,

solidarity, fun, resilience, empowerment and inquiry. An early school leaver and mother of three revisited those early learning experiences during the course of our interview:

The way you started it at the start Ann is ... "Come in" ... and I remember it. You had the small little room and you'd say "Come in to help you to help your children" ... That's the way it was ... and that's the way I found it great to help my child that time ... so we got used to it then and all the classes (Mature adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 2).

The focus expanded from developing parents' skills in relation to children's learning, to exploring their personal learning needs. These women spoke of their own school experiences, many of which were negative. These women felt they had been discriminated against because of their poverty or had to leave school early because of family circumstances. Their stories needed to be told and to be heard, so that in the telling new stories could emerge, and hope could be nurtured. One interviewee, a long time member of the project remarked how:

A lot of people left school feeling, not deprived of an education but deprived of their dignity, Ann. You know a lot of them were treated very badly in schools and I don't mean in a physical sense because physically you get over it. But you never get over being brow beaten in a way, and maybe being told you were stupid, and being told you won't do much in this life (Mature adult learner and committee member no.2).

In this fertile safe environment we began to explore the possibility of extending the adult education classes beyond the Wednesday morning class. These women prioritised a number of skills including knitting, literacy, yoga, keep-fit, cookery, and hairdressing, which they would like to learn. I recruited a number of voluntary tutors from within the area and from among my friends. These classes offered a 'first chance' to get involved to many adults learners, they ran in the morning and in the evening in the school building. According to the Limerick Leader (local newspaper):

(Kileely Community Project) offers the first chance most people in the area have got of adult education. Already keep-fit, yoga, and knitting classes are on offer, and as soon as they can acquire a cooker there will be cookery classes (Limerick Leader, 5 April, 1986).

The first adult-focused class was the Monday night knitting class. At this point we had 'acquired' two tables, a set of shelves and some chairs. This class had very broad appeal and was attended by women of various ages and levels of knitting skills.

KCP was nominated for the Hatch 33 Achievement Award, which was inaugurated by the Limerick City Unemployed Centre to recognise the achievements of unemployed people, and those who contributed to the betterment of society. KCP, along with the Limerick Rape Crisis centre, were the joint winners in the group category (Appendix G Hatch 33 Award). Subsequently, Radio Luimni broadcast a programme in which one participant described the benefits of the knitting class. These benefits had a personal and a community dimension:

We have great fun, and a great chat. I think it is essential that parents, women anyway, should come out and enjoy it for an hour or two. It's a great chat. We also learn a lot here at night, and I think it is very very good for the community (Mature Adult learner and committee member no. 3, South and About, Radio Luimni, 19 February, 1988).

Knitting proved to be a particularly good choice of class for that stage of the project development. Knitting was viewed as a non-threatening, 'enticing' activity. The tutor was highly skilled in her craft, 'a great laugh', and also committed to community development principles. She encouraged the group to identify their broader learning needs, and nurtured an atmosphere of support and solidarity:

It was the very the first class, was the knitting class, I'd say we wouldn't have gone if it was anything else, but the knitting was an enticement. I remember (tutor) she was brilliant. She could teach! The fun, the laughs. Other women telling us stories about doctors. All we did was laugh. And then, when people were feeling down ... I was going through all that stuff, and it was great to have someone to talk to. Because people knew, like you know, and it almost, it kinda shared the problem. It halved the problem in a sense like. To be able to talk about of it (Young adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 2).

Adult learners gained a range of skills, but the benefits of this programme extended well beyond skill development. The impact of KCP is discussed in Chapter Seven, 'Did Kileely Community Project Make a Difference?' As solidarity, friendships, and trust grew, people shared their personal stories, and supported each other through difficult times, as one young woman poignantly recalled, 'there were lots of tears in those years, when I was involved. Because my life was a mess at that time'. While people came with diverse skills, hopes, problems, and suggestions, they were treated equally and with respect. They shared information about the community, social welfare system, school system, and medical system. This was the seedbed of a strong and growing network of learners who through dialogue were developing and extending relationships within the community.

#### **6.4.1.1.1 Adult provision: Reconceptualising gossip**

Chapter Three, 'Methodology: Beyond Tools of Inquiry' made reference to Starhawk's conceptual framework of power, which included power-over, power-from-within, and power-with (1987:9). Starhawk defines power-with as 'the power of a strong individual in a group of equals, the power not to command but to suggest and be listened to, to begin something and see it happen' (ibid:10). She suggests the language of power-with is gossip, which has 'a bad reputation as being either malicious or trivial' (ibid:15). However, Starhawk views gossip positively and conceptualises it as the interest people express in each other's lives. This she believes provides us with 'invaluable information', which make us aware of 'whom we can trust and whom we distrust, of whom to treat carefully and whom to confront, of what we can realistically expect a group to do together' (ibid:16). While traditionally gossip came to be negatively associated with women, 'contemporary research has established that practically everyone gossips' (Tebbutt, 1995:2). Tebbutt defines gossip as 'talk about other people', and sees it as a 'significant feature of human language, its observations about behaviour performing an important integrative and socializing function' (ibid:1). Tebbutt defines gossip as 'essentially talk about other people's activities and behaviour' (ibid:1).

The participants of KCP exchanged a lot of talk, stories, local news, and information, and through it built solidarity, identity, and ownership. As a result of their interaction with KCP the nature of relationships between women changed. They moved from a situation where 'a lot of women were inside their homes years ago and no one knew what was going on' (committee focus group) to a situation where people gained skills, confidence and local knowledge:

We lived in the area but very few of us knew each other intimately. But when the project came along we started to know each other intimately. There would have been a kind of one to one contact. Whereas before you would say hello to your neighbour and pass the time of day. But you wouldn't be talking about .... But when you came here you knew who was getting married, who was having a baby. So you knew the more personal stuff really. And because of that you have better neighbours, and better contact, and a better understanding of what was happening in other people's lives really (Committee focus group).

As these women, and later other learners, shared stories and information they were building solidarity, networks, community spirit, and maintaining a social order. This core group of women were to become the backbone of the project, the well from which the committee was drawn and the touchstone for all further developments.

The knitting class attracted a diverse group of adult learners; parents of children in the school and others who were living in the area with no connection to the school. In this way KCP began to impact on the broader community. The holistic process of growth is captured below by one of the initial tutors, who recognised that the leadership was ‘within the group’ who were beginning to claim their ‘right to learn’:

I remember what was beginning to happen ... They women were beginning to identify other things they wanted to learn. That to me was just wonderful ... And like, all I was doing was, I was the person that came in, and they saw me maybe as the co-ordinator. They needed some kind of a symbol of leadership. But the leadership was within the group themselves, somehow. Because they were articulating, they were clear in what they wanted to do. And they were saying, “Gosh can we learn”. And one of the things I was trying to do, as well as the teaching, I was trying to get them to believe that they could do things themselves (Tutor no. 4).

The knitting class became the launch pad for many other adult education classes. When the voluntary knitting teacher moved on, a local woman, who herself had been a learner, taught knitting for many years afterwards. Video footage, taken at one of our social events captures the voices of some of the women, who attended the knitting class. It exhibits their work, and showcases the warm, supportive ambiance between these women, including their local tutor.

A variety of adult education classes were to follow. As soon as we had a cooker, fridge, and a sink, all second hand and donated, we began a morning cookery class, again taught by a local volunteer tutor. Another volunteer taught keep fit classes in the evening. An adult literacy class was taught by a retired teacher from the host school. This was a very tentative stage, with learners identifying their needs through a process of dialogue, and with me trying to match those needs by identifying tutors. Even in those early years the project was beginning to have a transformative effect. Hatch 33, the publication of the Limerick Unemployed Centre, profiled KCP in its September 1987 issue. In relation to literacy one participant acknowledged the benefits to herself and to her children:



The literacy class was excellent and one woman told us that, “Because I did literacy class, I can now read and write, and am able at long last to help my kids with schoolwork (Young adult learner, Hatch 33, Education Supplement, No. 2, September, 1987).

Enthusiasm and excitement permeated these early classes. Learners had gained some positive experiences as part of the ‘Parents and Children Learning Together’ programme, and were excited at the possibility of learning new skills.

#### **6.4.1.1.2 Adult provision: Barriers to participation**

Adult education opportunities were available in centres throughout Limerick City in the 1980s. The barriers to adult education for adults in our area prior to the establishment of KCP included; lack of local accessible learning opportunities, cost, childcare, transport, and lack of facilities. The financial barriers to adult participation in learning were highlighted by one of the KCP committee in an Open Mind, RTÉ interview in 1989.

I had left school at a very early age. I was looking out for a long time for to get into education one way or another. And you are looking up the paper for all these adult education classes. But they all cost! (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 1, Education Forum, RTÉ, 31 October, 1989).

However, there was also some degree of reticence among adult learners. In a Radio Luimni interview in 1988, one of the KCP committee members acknowledges the social barriers to participation in adult education, she stated that ‘some people are quite shy, especially if they haven’t got a friend to come up to the class with’ (Mature Adult learner and committee member no. 2, Radio Luimni 19th February, 1988). One young woman I interviewed believed dramatic social changes had taken place in the lifespan of KCP, not specifically in relation to KCP but in Irish life in general. One of the major differences was in terms of women’s personal freedom. She confided that in her home she and her partner raised the children together and shared a social life. She compared her own quality of life to that of her mother’s. Her mother ‘didn’t go across the road, she never even went to Kilkee (seaside) for a day on her own. She wouldn’t be left (allowed) do it’. In hushed tones she described how women of her mother’s generation wouldn’t be ‘left go’ as ‘his dinner would have to be on the table’, and the women ‘hadn’t enough money for food never mind a foreign holiday’.

Not many women spoke of the politics of how money was managed within households either twenty years ago or now. Nor indeed was money management the topic of this thesis. However, they did consistently speak of quality of life. Unfortunately there was little research into what Daly calls the ‘control and management of money’ (1989: 26). There is no doubt that in some households control of money by a dominant partner exacerbated the effects of poverty. I myself witnessed former school friends, waiting outside the social welfare office to collect their share of the social welfare payment from their spouses. Daly problematised the concept of family payments, when the ‘concept of family (i.e. the male) payment is still widespread, both in the labour market and the social welfare system’ (1988:4). Daly decried the dearth of information that existed on poverty among Irish women at that time and signalled the emergence of the international phenomenon the ‘feminisation of poverty’, where ‘women are forming an increasing proportion of the world’s poor and are more visible in their poverty than ever before’ (1989:6).

Adult learners who participated in KCP initiatives and programmes had left school at a young age. Many had negative school experiences. Consequently, some of the interviewees said that they had little confidence in their capacity to be part of a learning programme. Some adult learners needed encouragement to get involved with KCP at the outset. I often called to eight or nine homes on a day to encourage women to attend classes. Sometimes women were delighted to be reminded to attend. On a number of occasions as I stood in homes I realised these women had to ‘claim the right’ to attend classes, once they were convinced themselves, they sometimes had to convince those they lived with. These women supported each other to get involved, and since the beginning of KCP women looked out for and looked after each other. They encouraged each other to come along, and if a woman was missing for a while, her co-learners or tutor would contact her to see that she was okay. One of the tutors from the early years recognised the needs of these reticent adult learners, and realised that they needed to be encouraged, supported, and respected. She believed I had to:

...encourage them to come along. But once they came in they felt there was someone caring for them. Someone looking out for them that they never had before. And that there was no one talking down to them ... And there was a bit of fun as well you see, the fun, you know the fun (Tutor no. 3).

In the RTÉ 'Education Forum' programme, broadcast in March 1986, John Quinn interviewed a panel of Limerick based educationalists. This panel, drawn from different sectors debated the role of education, how success might be understood, the barriers to educational achievement, the nature of adult education, and need to develop an holistic vision and service for all learners cognisant of the inequalities which existed. The issue of barriers to accessing educational provision for adults who had left school early was raised. Deirdre Frawley, Adult Education officer with City of Limerick Vocational Educational Committee (CLVEC), highlighted the lack of funding to provide adequate adult education provision. She also acknowledged the personal barriers for people who have not benefited from the educational system and highlighted the long-term impact for people who have had negative experiences as young learners:

What happens at Primary level, Post Primary level, affects people. [It affects] their attitudes towards learning. The whole system has left a lot of people with a feeling of guilt about their own learning, with a sense of failure (Deirdre Frawley, Adult Education Officer, Limerick City Vocational Educational Committee, Education Forum, RTÉ, 20 March, 1986).

The specific cultural context in which KCP evolved also created barriers to participation. These included expectations about the role of women and men in the society and indeed in the home, prevalent at that time. During the 80s, women living in working class areas typically stayed in the home, attended to the children, the sick and the elderly, and took the bulk of domestic responsibility. In the words of one participant, 'working mothers weren't heard of. They would be very few and far between. So your day consisted of being permanently in the house, except maybe to 'run to the shops, or to town if you were lucky'. Women in our area had little or no opportunities to participate in a learning community, as one woman frustrated by her housebound existence said 'I had a terrible longing for a different kind of conversation'. According to Daly, access to resources and opportunities were determined by class and gender (1989: 8). Many women had to be convinced of their right to learn as well as their capability. Basically adult learners were being asked, motivated, and encouraged to engage in learning, to do so within a Primary school, and in the company of their neighbours. In today's parlance, it was a 'big ask' for learners who had negative school experiences, left school early, had no tradition of adult learning, and no tradition of gathering in this way. One of the founder members of the project outlines the transformation process:

First of all it was a matter of motivating people to come, because people were very reticent at that stage ... It was something new, and it wasn't something they were familiar with Ann. And so basically when it started off, you had a very small group, and as the smaller group began to enjoy the things, they began to encourage other people to come along. So I think it was more word of mouth that did most of it, rather than any advertising on anyone's behalf. And then it just grew from there. And as the interests of people became apparent, the classes grew from knitting to crochet, we even tried that. We tried all sorts of things we got very adventurous. It was great! (Mature adult learner and committee member number 2).

This cultural context was also identified by one of the young adult learners who remarked, 'at that time Ann, people weren't as open to things as they are now. You would have had to push people to go in there [to attend adult education classes]'

One of the young adult learners I interviewed spoke passionately about the transformative impact of KCP on her mother's quality of life. As she considered the change in her mother's lifestyle she pensively explained, 'it was great for my mother to come to classes, for her to get away from the family. Because she had spent so many years looking after her family that I don't remember my mother being in anything until the classes started over here'. One mature learner, conscious of how housebound her life had been prior to KCP said that 'the more you stay in it, the more you are left in it', and when 'you get a break it gives you a better outlook'. Another young woman spoke of how much her 'mother loved getting out of the house and she got further education out of it. She really really did like. You would see the difference in her. She was more confident'.

Video footage from the 'communications class' of 1986 portrays a group of women sitting around the table in the school kitchen. They speak about the value of KCP to them, highlighting the social outlet KCP provides for them. They list the classes, socials, and day trips as highlights in their lives. They speak about the high unemployment rate, how they expect their children to emigrate to England, and the very practical implications of living with very little money. One woman, a mother of four children, said that she had not visited her sister on the south side of the city for three months as the bus fares cost £2.50 and it was beyond her resources. The women discussed the extra costs a family faced when a loved one was in hospital, bus fares being a major worry. There was a frank discussion on the Children's Allowance<sup>6</sup>,

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<sup>6</sup> The Children's Allowance, a government payment, is paid to the mother in each family irrespective of economic status on a monthly basis.

which the women would love to spend on their children, but the Electricity Supply Board bill and the fuel bills were waiting to be paid. They believed that employers were increasingly looking for qualifications even for relatively menial positions. They were acutely aware of the political situation and said they would ‘love to see Charles Haughey living on what we live on’. They were acutely aware of their impoverished situations, health cut backs, transport costs, emigration. They felt that ‘working class’ people had little hope of training and employment and had real worries for their children’s futures.

Twenty years later participants in the committee focus group spoke about the poverty, unemployment, and emigration of the 1980s. They talked about how difficult it was for young people to find work when ‘the likes of Mc Donald’s were looking for people with a Leaving Cert to hand out chips’ (Committee focus group). A mother of four, and long-term member of KCP remembers the 1980s as a time when ‘places like Kileely were worst hit, because of reliance on industry and manual labour’. Daly’s description of the implications and realities of living in poverty echo the sentiments of the women in my own study. Daly’s participants spoke about the worry of paying bills, the cost of bus fares, the ‘immense labour and energy’ involved in making ends meet, and ultimately the ‘hard work that poverty entails’ (1989: 25). In an earlier publication, profiling the proceedings of a ‘Women and Poverty in Ireland’ seminar, Daly identifies three reasons for the increase in poverty among women, population and social change, increasing numbers (1988:3). In Chapter Five, ‘Area Profile’ I described the economic, social, and educational context in which KCP evolved in detail.

#### **6.4.1.1.3 Profile of learners**

We never kept a register of adult learners. Adult learners broadly fell into one of three categories. The core group attended most classes and were committed to learning a wide variety of skills. A second group were transient, they came and went according to the classes on offer, never lost contact but might not have attended on a weekly basis. The third, and final group were the newcomers, who came to learn a specific skill and then moved on. In October 1991, the Adult Education officer with CLVEC awarded certificates of attendance and achievement, to KCP adult learners. According to the Limerick Leader, a local Limerick newspaper:

The fantastic interest and involvement by Kileely community in adult education was demonstrated during the week at the presentation of certificates to 60 women who completed VEC courses. Deirdre Frawley, the city Adult Education Officer, said it was the largest single group ever to receive course certificates, and this was a reflection of the super spirit of participation by so many people (Limerick Leader, 9 November, 1991).

Ultimately, KCP offered learning opportunities in a community which ‘never had anything going for them’, in which women in particular ‘never had any place to go’ or ‘anything to do’ (Mature adult learner no. 3).

#### **6.4.1.1.4 Adult provision: Leadership**

Leadership is key to survival, success, and sustainability of any educational endeavour. KCP is no exception. The issue of leadership is explored in Chapter Eight ‘Celebrating the Survival, Success and Sustainability of Kileely Community Project: Excavating the Factors that Made Kileely Community Project Work’. KCP nurtured leadership within the community. As the number of classes increased a core group of committed local women emerged who were dedicated to the development of KCP. I approached eight local women who had individually shown a great interest in, and commitment to KCP and asked them if they would help to form a committee to run the project. Seven of the eight agreed. Those seven women remained with the project for the past twenty years as adult learners and committee members. Two of our founding committee members died in recent years and one emigrated. During stage 3 of the development of KCP the committee was actively discussing committee membership and sustainability.

As KCP grew and developed so too did the responsibilities of the committee. The committee were all active adult learners living in the area. As a result, they were very aware of adult learning needs and most importantly were well aware of the financial and social constraints on the adults involved in KCP. The insights they brought informed developments, so that to the best of our ability, the adult education programme matched the learning needs of the community. As the committee became more confident the individual skills, strengths, and talents of the women emerged. They became adept at organising, planning, and managing within the limited resources available. As a group, they consulted with the adult learners and were implicitly trusted by them.

The committee met formally on a monthly basis to review and to plan project activities. However, in reality, the committee were active on a daily basis, attending classes, recruiting learners, and actively listening to the needs of the community.

#### **6.4.1.1.5 Adult provision: The social dimension of Kileely Community Project**

The social dimension of KCP is also core to its survival, success and sustainability. Three specific social activities developed directly as a result of participation in KCP. These activities met identified needs, the need to have fun, to celebrate, and to extend our worlds. Firstly, the committee initiated an annual ‘social’, initially held in the school and in later years in the city. Secondly we organised trips and holidays. We organised women’s holidays, which comprised of a long weekend away, for which women began saving in January. We organised women’s day trips to facilitate the women who could not leave home overnight. And we also organised family day trips. Furthermore, groups of participants attending classes saved on a weekly basis and went for meals to a selection of restaurants. Finally, when KCP activities finished during holiday time, participants met and went walking and swimming, as groups of women and as family groups.

As the adult education classes and related activities developed the committee grew in confidence. We knew people were learning and having fun. We decided to celebrate our achievements and to run a Christmas ‘social’ or dance. This was held in the school. We converted one classroom to a ‘dining room’ for the night. In our school kitchen we cooked Christmas dinners complete with turkeys, hams, and all the trimmings. We served them to each other using plates and cutlery borrowed from the homes of participants. We played party games, sang songs, and danced to the music from a record player set up in the corner of the room. At the end of the night we washed dishes, restored most of the cutlery, dishes and chairs we had borrowed from the various houses, and went home exhausted, delighted, and feeling a deep sense of solidarity and achievement. These socials became part of the folklore of the area and the fabric of the project. In later years this ‘social’ was held in venues in the city. When asked to identify the highlights of involvement in the classes, adult learners often spoke of our ‘socials’.

The dances in the school. I loved it, and do you know what I loved so much about it? There was no drink involved. We had the best nights ever. Those nights were brilliant, and it was just our ... our drinks, our coke, lemonade, and that was it. And we had lovely food. We had a ball ... musical chairs. They were hysterical, they were now. Someone would do something silly, I used to be laughing and the tears coming out of my eyes (Young adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother number 2).

These occasions were the social highlight of the year for many people. In a non-threatening environment we laughed, danced, and sang, and I believe 'claimed' the right to learn and build community together. The women I interviewed spoke of these social events as highlights in their lives. These women-only events enabled women to bond and get to know each other.

The women in the classes decided they would like to go on holiday together. So the committee explored possibilities. We opted for a weekend break. Participants needed to save in order to be able to go on holidays. A committee member collected about £5 per week, often less, from participants for approximately five months prior to the holiday. In a small notebook she kept track of the money saved, deducted the cost of the holiday, and presented them with the balance of their savings, when they were finally seated on the bus parked outside the school on the morning of the trip. This system ensured the women had the price of the trip, and that they had some spending money. This committee member is a great woman, a quiet woman, a natural community activist, with a talent and an instinct for encouraging people to participate in their community. The first of these 'ventures' was to the Aran Islands, a trip fondly remembered by one mature adult learner, who remarked 'I never dreamed in my whole life that I would see the Aran Islands. It was just great'. We organised many annual trips to various locations including, Dingle, Carna, and New Ross. We departed as early as possible on Friday morning and came home as late as possible on Sunday night. During the 'holiday' we walked, hired bikes, went on boat trips, danced, and sang. For many women this was the only break they got in the entire year. The holiday stories became part of the folklore of the area. Holiday photographs and videos were viewed many times during the years and served to build bonds and remind us of the fun we had together.

Women also saved to go to restaurants for meals. They loved these experiences, as it provided an opportunity to dress up and have fun. In the words of one of the participants, 'If we didn't have those dinners we would never get out for a dinner.'



Well, to go to dinner. Getting your face washed and your hair done and making arrangements for taxis, it's arranging for taxis, and what time will we meet, and how many is going in this taxi?'

When KCP activities cease during the summer these women meet to walk and swim together as a group and also as family groups. They attend each other's weddings, go on holidays independent of KCP, and attend other adult education opportunities in nearby areas.

The dynamic interaction and growing solidarity formed a foundation for long-term sustainability. The tentative first classes, first socials, first holidays together built our confidence and confirmed that as a group we were capable of positively impacting on and transforming our world.

#### **6.4.1.2 Stage 1: Provision for children**

In the autumn of 1985 I was working with parents to enhance their skills as proactive teachers in their children's learning. Over a period of weeks I listened to the high aspirations parents had for their children. I came to realise that the development of an after school programme, in which parents and children worked with me, as a logical and natural extension of the parents' programme. And so the 'Three O'Clock School' was born. Naming the initiative was more troublesome than you might expect. Some people believed it should be called after me, an idea I rejected completely. Others thought it should be called after a saint. My mother lives across the road from the estate in which the school is located, and both adults and children called to her house in order to contact me. This was an era when we did not have a phone in the school, or in my home. Anyway, one day there was a knock at my mother's door. As it happened I was there. I opened the door and one of the kids from the after school programme simply asked 'Ann, is the '3 o'clock school on today'? Eureka. We had found a name.

The 'Three O'Clock School' was founded to offer children opportunities for learning outside of school hours. The school Principal again offered her support for this initiative. Four mothers who had attended the initial parents programme volunteered to work with me. The programme ran in the school, began at 3 o'clock, and offered

children a rich and varied programme. The ‘Three O’Clock School’ can best be described as a learning journey which affected the lives of all participants, including mothers, children, and tutors.

The ‘Three O’Clock School’ offered a varied programme and sought to support children’s diverse needs. Some children blossomed through academic support, others enjoyed the social programme and developed their personal and interpersonal skills, and all children enjoyed the creative programme. Children were offered opportunities which they might not otherwise get, as one former participant said, ‘ things were bad in those days. They were poorer and you might not have as much as other children. You always got your needs met emotionally and as well food wise....’(former ‘Three O’Clock School’ participant).

The children who attended the ‘Three O’Clock School’ were also attending the host primary school, and a number of other schools, both Primary and Secondary across the city. Children often attended in family groups. This facilitated mothers to attend as there were no childcare issues. The composition of the ‘Three O’Clock School’ changed over time in response to the children’s needs, parents’ availability, and indeed the resources available. The ‘Three O’Clock School’ initially operated two days per week, and subsequently increased to four days per week. As numbers grew, we sub-divided the children into two groups and offered each group the opportunity to attend two days per week.

#### **6.4.1.2.1 Provision for children: Tutors who cared**

I have described how the CLVEC supported KCP by supplying tutors for the adult classes. They also supplied tutors for the ‘Three O’Clock School’. I was employed as a tutor, and they also made a second tutor available. One day a young man called to say he had been sent by the CLVEC to work with the ‘Three O’Clock School’. I remember looking at him and thinking ‘what am I going to do with him?’ How well will he fit in with the ethos of our project? What will the parents think of him? We did not have a male teacher in the host school, so this too would be a new experience for some of the children. He brought with him new skills, new insights, and a long-term commitment to the children, and the adults. Furthermore, having a male role model proved to be a very valuable asset. The former ‘Three O’Clock School’

participants and their parents were loud in their praise for his teaching skills, mentoring ability, and genuine care for them.

Throughout this phase I continued to seek funding to support the activities of KCP. I was fortunate in my friends who were generous with their time and with their resources. However, I was always conscious of the need to develop sustainable long term funding. A social worker, who was aware of the work of KCP, advocated on behalf of KCP for funding and recognition. She was aware of our precarious funding position and she petitioned the Mid Western Health Board to support the project. She stated that: 'The project to date has been funded by voluntary contributions and fundraising activities. As a consequence finance is haphazard and the future of the project is uncertain' (letter dated August 1986).

Her rationale for supporting KCP was as follows. She believed 'it is well thought through and founded on sound theory'. Secondly, 'the age range of children catered for is 5-11 years which increases the probability of sound intervention'. Thirdly, 'intensive work is done with a small group of children' and finally, 'there is on-going work with parents and families' (letter dated August 1986).

#### **6.4.1.2.2 Provision for children: Activities of the 'Three O'Clock School'**

It is difficult to describe a typical session in the 'Three O'Clock School' during the early years. We constantly reviewed and changed the programme and also how we operated. In 1987 the 'communications' adult education class made a video of KCP, a section of which portrayed the 'Three O'Clock School'. I also have hundreds of photographs relating to this period. In the video children of different ages are actively engaged in a variety of activities. These activities include reading, writing, playing games, painting, baking, and eating dinner. Parents and tutors were involved in all these activities with the children. The footage shows the children eating dinner together, with mothers eating with them, talking with them, and serving dinner. Later children gather and sing and talk together, smaller children sitting on older children's and adults' laps. The energy in the group is palpable as children describe their favourite activities with academic activities rating at the top of the list.

On a given day there might be 16 children present in the 'Three O'Clock School', ranging in age from a baby to fourteen years old. Sometimes we had whole group activities and sometimes we divided the children into small groups. Each group would take turns doing an activity for half an hour, and a parent or tutor led each activity. In this way children rotated between activities and were supported in their learning by both parents and tutors. The 'Three O'Clock School' mothers worked tirelessly to bring learning opportunities to all the children. The 'Three O'Clock School' programme developed as the school evolved. Our on-site activities included academic support, creative, and social education. We expanded our programme to move off-site and organised family holidays, family day trips, and afternoon trips. We visited places of educational and social interest. We did not have the luxury of a bus, so tutors drove children to these activities. In time we were lucky to have a volunteer with a mini bus, who we called upon to provide transport on occasion.

During the initial stage of KCP I had a growing awareness of the potential of out of school activities to contribute to the growth and development of the child. I was also aware that the 'Three O'Clock School' programme catered for a limited number of children. With the support of a childcare worker, who was on placement with KCP, and in an effort to offer extra curricular learning opportunities to a greater number of children, we established a Saturday morning art class. This initiative ran for a couple of years and was open to children attending the host school. We discontinued the classes after two years due to work pressures and lack of resources.

#### **6.4.1.3 Resources**

We had very little stuff here. What we had was a lot of good will from people who were anxious ... who wanted to have something in their own area. Because it never had anything (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 2).

It is important to understand the physical, as well as the social and economic conditions, in which KCP evolved. Firstly, the adult education classes were located in a former classroom, a converted cloakroom with a low ceiling, no running water, and no storage space (room 6), 'we had no cooker or nothing, we had nothing' (Mature adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 2). Adults sat on old school desks (remember this is an infant school so the desks were quite small). The physical building was in poor condition and it was regularly vandalised. It was not uncommon to find windows broken and roof slates strewn around the yard.

During the initial stage of KCP I was very conscious of the need to find a funding source for salaries for tutors and for resources. I wrote to various government departments, describing the area and KCP as it was evolving. I described the needs we were seeking to address. While many responses commended the work, no long term funding was forthcoming. In the spring of 1986 CLVEC came on board and supported KCP by supplying tutors for adult classes and the 'Three O'Clock School'.

KCP required resources to facilitate the delivery of adult and child centered programmes. We needed equipment for the growing number of classes, floor covering for the kitchen, and money to subsidise equipment, trips and holidays. A number of individuals were very generous with their time, financial donations, and even the use of a holiday home which enabled families to have a holiday by the sea. We also received an annual donation from a private funder that enabled us to provide an enriched service.

We ran a number of jumble sales to raise money. The adults in the classes donated food, toys, clothes, and baked cakes. We gathered goods over a couple of months, and held the jumble sale in one of the classrooms. We made approx £60, a tiny sum, from two months work, but we had such fun, and we worked so hard together, that the process built solidarity and ownership among the committee and learners within KCP. We even wore each other's second hand clothes:

Sure there was nothing down there ... The doors were falling off presses. There was no equipment there. I mean the first time we could buy cutlery and pots ... who ever thought we'd see the day when we'd would have a microwave? ... for God's sake ... and the fridge ... That fridge should have gone to a very comfortable retirement ... because it did us very well. And the oil cloth, do you remember the discussion about the oil cloth?[table cloth] I mean who would have a discussion about an oilcloth at a meeting? Every penny we ever got we bought another bit and another bit (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 1).

Many of the initial adult learners who had attended the morning class joined the Monday night knitting class, and then went on to join other classes. One of the very active adult learners, a mother of children in the school, was also the daughter of the school caretaker.<sup>7</sup> This younger woman very naturally assumed the role of opening

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<sup>7</sup> Our caretaker was a very special woman, in her late seventies. One of the first residents of the area, she had worked in the school for the best part of thirty years. The children called her 'nana' and indeed

and closing up the school for night classes. While I had initially organised refreshments etc. for the ‘Parents and Children Learning Together’ programme, the emerging extended adult education programme needed substantial supports. These practical supports included taking responsibility for opening and closing the school, and looking after refreshments and equipment. KCP had quickly outgrown my capacity to attend to these responsibilities, and the committee members assumed these responsibilities.

#### **6.4.1.4 My role during Stage 1**

I assumed a number of different roles at the initial stage of the project. I designed and delivered a programme to parents, worked actively to develop a more extensive adult education programme, formed a local committee, sought out volunteer tutors, liaised with the host school, visited homes to recruit and encourage adult learners, set up and taught in the ‘Three O’Clock School’, fundraised, built relationships with external agencies, and sought ways to make KCP sustainable. KCP successfully gained recognition as a community education provider from CLVEC. I also attended adult education classes as a learner. This proved to be valuable, not only in terms of developing my own skills, but also in sensitising me to issues as they arose. I gained an insight into the importance of understanding the context and prior experiences of adult learners. I came to understand that the tutor’s approach to learning and teaching was fundamental to making learning accessible.

#### **6.4.1.5 Structures**

In 1984, the school building housed an infant school. In 1985 it housed an infant school and an adult education class for parents. By January 1986 the range of adult classes had grown and the ‘Three O’Clock School’ had been established. During the initial stage the FÁS CE Scheme was established in the host school. I managed the scheme<sup>8</sup>. Initially the FÁS CE Scheme had one worker who had care taking and

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she was their nana in many ways. She knew their mothers and grandmothers, and related to teachers and children very well. She heated milk and gave the ‘free bun and milk’ to children whose parents were unemployed. She became a stalwart supporter of KCP and encouraged parents to attend. She often sat in on classes herself, was very much loved by the adult learners and tutors.

<sup>8</sup> As project manager, I was responsible for the recruitment and supervision of the one worker on the scheme. I was also responsible for administration and correspondence with FÁS.

general maintenance responsibilities. The school premises were open to the community during and after school operating hours.

The evolution, development, and sustainability of KCP cannot be understood without reference to the relationships between services located in the school building. KCP evolved within the school building. Parents of the children in the school attended the adult education classes and the 'Three O'Clock School'. Children from the school attended the 'Three O'Clock School' and the Saturday morning art classes. During this stage I taught in the adult classes, and the 'Three O'Clock School'. Members of KCP committee were both parents of children in the school, and members of the wider community. Members of KCP committee attended the adult classes and the 'Three O'Clock School'. A member of KCP committee also acted as voluntary tutor for the adult classes. I regularly discussed project developments with the school Principal. The FÁS CE Scheme was also established in the school.

#### **6.4.1.6 Stage 1: Conclusion**

In this section I have described the initial stage of development of KCP. I have traced the evolution of the adult education programme and the spin off activities associated with it. The evolution, programme, and modus operandi of the 'Three O'Clock School' have also been described.

During this initial stage the foundations stones of KCP were laid. The impact of involvement for adults and children is explored in Chapter Seven, 'Did Kileely Community Project Make a Difference?' Significant developments occurred in this phase which enabled subsequent developments. Firstly, on an official level, our success in gaining recognition as a community education provider, with the consequent funding of tutors by CLVEC was a very significant development. Secondly, at local level, the development of an effective, dedicated committee informed the development of KCP, and ensured it was responsive to local learning needs. The FÁS CE Scheme brought much needed resources to the school in terms of personnel and materials. Significantly, the school building was 'regenerated' as a community-learning centre.

## **6.4.2 Stage 2: Dancing with pride, from 1991 to 1998**

The mid stage charts developments from 1991 to 1998. It profiles how KCP evolved within this period, and explores the structures and services which contributed to the development of KCP.

### **6.4.2.1 Kileely Community Project**

My role, as KCP project director, in this mid stage, was very different from that in the initial stage of development. Firstly, having taken the maximum five years career break I resigned my teaching position, thus relinquishing my entitlement to redeployment in another school. I chose to resign my teaching position as KCP was still developing, and I still wanted to be involved in its growth and development.

By 1990, due to declining enrolment, the school had become a one-teacher school. In 1991, the one remaining teacher, the Principal, went on leave and I replaced her as a substitute teacher, the sole teacher on staff. This change facilitated me to teach in the school again which I very much enjoyed. It also allowed me to be close to KCP which continued to grow and develop. At the end of the 1991-1992 school year the Principal retired. I was then the only teacher in the school, operating in a temporary capacity.

While I was teaching in the school, KCP continued to grow and expand. The committee continued to run the classes. The 'Three O'Clock School' continued to function very well. A voluntary tutor who had worked in the 'Three O'Clock School', replaced me as one of two paid tutors. She brought a wealth of skills and experience to the children and indeed to KCP. Furthermore, we developed two new initiatives, the SPACE project, designed to support young lone mothers, and the pre-school, specifically set up to offer learning opportunities to children who would later be attending the host school.

The end of the 91-92 school year was a cross roads for me personally and for the host school. My teacher status was temporary, which meant there was no permanent position in the school, a factor which left the school vulnerable to closure. KCP was going well, and I believed there was plenty of scope for development. The state of the building had deteriorated badly and it needed significant renovation. I called a public



meeting to highlight the predicament of the school. I invited parents of children attending the school at the time, and parents of non-school going children in the area. I explained the system by which teachers are appointed, and relayed my fears for the future of the school. I told them that we needed to have a specific number of children on roll in order to appoint a second teacher in September 1992. This was a frank and open meeting. There were fears that the school would close, and some families were reticent to send their children to the school under those circumstances. One young mother who had sent her older child to another Primary school, looked me straight in the eye and said that she would ‘give me a loan of her second child for one year’, keep an eye on how he was doing, and if all was not well, she told me she would take him away and send him to another school at the end of that school year. I told her I would do my best for him, and encouraged her to bring her concerns to me at any stage. This young mother became a proactive adult learner, a strong advocate for the school, and a founder member of the pre-school.

In September 1992, the school had sufficient enrolment to appoint a second teacher. This was the turning point for the school. Now there were two teachers (both with temporary status) on staff. The school was growing, KCP was thriving, and there were significant developments about to take place.

KCP’s core activities continued unabated. The morning and evening adult education classes continued to thrive as new members joined annually. The variety of classes also expanded. The CLVEC continued to supply tutors, and the range of classes increased as tutors with different skills became available. A KCP committee meeting of October 1997 records eight adult education classes per week, these included, keep fit, sewing, english, hairdressing (2 classes), cookery (2 classes), and guitar. Voluntary tutors also continued to offer their services.

During stage 2, I continued to take responsibility for tutor hours and grant applications.<sup>9</sup> Applications made in 1994 and 1996 to the Department of Social Welfare defined the aims of the adult education programme as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> Application was to be made to Limerick City VEC on an annual basis for teaching hours for the adult classes and the Three o’clock School. Furthermore, the Disadvantaged Youth Grant, administered by the VEC, which supported the operating costs of the Three o’clock School must be applied and accounted for on an annual basis.

- To offer educational, social, and creative opportunities to adults who themselves have left school early (average age 12);
- To empower them to look at their lives and become enriched and happy;
- To foster personal, group, and community development;
- To offer families an opportunity for growth and development through a variety of activities;
- To nurture a sense of solidarity, power, and responsibility;
- To have fun;
- To offer a social outlet to women;
- To provide an environment of mutual support and solidarity for women under stress;
- To offer a variety of learning opportunities, and an encouragement to go back to school or to go on to study;
- To empower women to look into their own lives and to be agents for change;
- To encourage women to be active vibrant agents in their community;
- To help women look at health issues, social welfare, and justice issues;
- To provide any information requested and to host speakers on relevant topics.

KCP continued to organise annual holidays for women attending the adult classes. We also organised day trips for women only, and for families. We initiated day trips as the ‘weekend holidays’ were not always a feasible option due to cost, and family commitments. As the number of adults attending classes increased it was necessary to find a bigger venue in which to hold the annual socials. After many enjoyable years of dancing, singing, and laughing in the school we moved to a larger premises in Limerick City.

The ‘Three O’Clock School’ also continued to develop and thrive during this phase. The tutors worked creatively to bring learning opportunities to the children. During the last two years of the mid stage, direct parental involvement ceased. The initial cohort of children and parents who had been directly involved in the initial stage, had outgrown the ‘Three O’Clock School’ and moved on. A new cohort of children attended the ‘Three O’Clock School’. While parents of the new ‘Three O’Clock School’ children did not become directly involved, they continued to be indirectly involved.<sup>10</sup> The tutors consulted parents about their children, and parents attended Christmas parties and outings. During stage 2 the ‘Three O’Clock School’ operated two days per week. In the last two years of the mid stage, we decided to focus on young children, specifically children attending the host school, so that maximum results could be achieved within the resources available. The children were selected through consultation with teachers and parents. There was also a ‘right of entry’

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<sup>10</sup> During stage 1, parents were both directly and indirectly involved. A small number of parents were directly involved on a daily basis. Other parents were involved informally, meeting tutors, attending parties and celebrations, and going on trips. During the stage 2, direct parental involvement ceased when the children of parents ‘directly’ involved graduated from the Three o’clock School. Parents continued to be indirectly involved during the second stage.

based on membership of previous family members. An application to the Department of Education, Youth Affairs section, in 1993 profiles the aims of the ‘Three O’Clock School’ as follows:

- To target young people within our community, enhance their quality of life and to provide them with basic social, literacy, communication and survival skills;
- To nurture positive adult and youth relationships;
- To foster a sense of positive self and community identity;
- To encourage a sense of self worth and enrichment;
- To foster a sense of achievement and success;
- To provide opportunities for learning and help young people acquire the skills of working, sharing, and learning together in a harmonious way;
- To provide opportunities for fun and enjoyment through sports, arts, crafts, literacy, cookery etc;
- To enable the children to have fun and create happy memories.

The rich programme of activities and holidays continued. In a school inspectorate report in 1993 the local inspector commended the work of the Principal, and acknowledged the importance of the ‘Three O’Clock School’:

This ‘school’, the idea of the present Principal, is a type of school which is conducted after school hours and which involves both parents and pupils – especially the pupils who have specific needs ... She, the Principal, cannot be commended highly enough for this initiative.

#### **6.4.2.2 Innovation**

We developed two new initiatives during Stage 2 of the development of KCP. Firstly, a strand called the SPACE project was developed by a member of KCP committee specifically for young women who were young mothers and were neither in educational provision nor in employment. Secondly we developed a pre-school specifically to meet the learning needs of children who would be attending the host school.

##### **6.4.2.2.1 The SPACE project**

During stage 2, KCP classes were well attended and continued to attract new members. I now realise that our stability and success nurtured confidence in myself and in the committee. A committee member noted that we were failing to attract young women who were parenting alone to our adult education classes. This committee member took the initiative to develop a new strand within KCP, the

SPACE programme. It was designed to offer space to young women who were mothers in which they would be facilitated to explore their learning and support.

Our committee member was very disturbed that young women who were mothers were denied access to education, and that they had limited opportunities for personal and social interaction. Conscious that fatherhood does not affect a 'fella's life, cos he can go through the whole school college and whatever', she sought to create opportunities for young women to address their own learning needs. She recruited a group of young girls who were interested in becoming involved in this initiative. They met in room 4, a separate room from the other adult classes. As previously noted, the host school had vacant classrooms due to decreasing enrolment, and as Principal I was only too delighted to make a room available to the SPACE initiative. On foot of their successful grant application, these young women bought a carpet and some comfortable chairs, and created a 'sitting room' within the school. This room was used by SPACE, and also by other adult learners, as well as by the school itself. Video footage of the project shows this group of young women along with their facilitator, sitting on cane furniture, talking about their needs, and sharing the impact SPACE had made on their lives. SPACE provided them with the opportunity to talk, share, and 'spill their guts out', in a safe, confidential environment.

The SPACE project, like other aspects of KCP sought grants to meet capital expenditure and running costs. Copies of grant applications which I made in 1994, define the aims of the SPACE project as follows:

- To target young teenage mothers to provide opportunities for solidarity and mutual understanding;
- To limit the risk of isolation by providing them with 'SPACE' of their own;
- To encourage young mothers to identify their own needs, educationally and socially;
- To examine health issues both in terms of their own, and their children's health;
- To provide health and educational opportunities as identified by the young women;
- To provide self-awareness, assertiveness, and self-empowerment programmes for young women;
- To help them deal with their health and welfare issues;
- To provide crèche facilities so that these young women would have 'SPACE' from their children to examine their needs;
- SPACE aims to equip the young women to become agents of change in their own lives, to help them to reflect on their lives at present and identify their hopes for the future;
- SPACE aims to link up with any other group which can help on the road to empowerment.

SPACE participants devised their own programme. Some activities were school-based and others took place outside the school in the wider community. As young, lone parents they discussed their personal circumstances, and their aspirations for themselves, and indeed for their children. They invited guest speakers on topics such as women's health, social welfare, employment, and education. They explored options for further education and employment. They went swimming with their babies. All of this was made possible because one KCP committee member was committed to their growth and development.

One of the big impediments to adult education is the absence of childcare facilities. Initially we created an ad hoc crèche in the corner of the room being used by the SPACE project. This basically consisted of a square of red carpet, and a collection of donated toys. Later crèche facilities were established as part of the FÁS CE Scheme. Room 5 was designated as a crèche, and the young mothers had the freedom to attend their classes, confident that their children were safe. Leaving their babies in the care of others did not come easily, as the women felt a keen sense of responsibility. The SPACE project ran for almost two years. It had one cohort of participants. The young women who attended the SPACE project moved into further education and employment. They also joined the adult education classes within KCP. In Chapter Seven, 'Did Kileely Community Project Make a Difference?' the voices of SPACE participants graphically describe the impact KCP had on their lives.

#### **6.4.2.2.2 The pre-school**

In 1993 one of the young adult learners approached me with a proposal to set up a pre-school within the school. There had been a pre-school located in the school a number of years previously which had closed. That pre-school had operated independently of the school. We envisaged that the new pre-school, should we be successful in establishing it, would be closely connected to the host school. She and I approached parents of young children and established that there was a need for the service. We approached the social services, made our case, and were eventually successful in our funding bid. This pre-school was subject to the Board of Management of the host school. While the pre-school teacher's salary was paid through the social services centre, the pre-school was intrinsically linked to the host

school. It was a precondition that any child attending the pre-school would subsequently attend the host school.

During the mid stage, the integration of school-based services remained a priority. The pre-school played a key role in meeting the needs of the learning community. The pre-school operated successfully, and in fact was over subscribed. It offered a rich and varied learning programme. The children's transition from the pre-school to Junior infants, the first year of the Primary school cycle, was a natural affair. This was in sharp contrast to my earlier years teaching when young children were sometimes very traumatised by their first experience of separation from their parents. Parents of pre-school children attended the morning adult education classes.

### **6.4.2.3 Structures**

KCP had always been made very welcome by the host school. Whatever resources<sup>11</sup> existed were shared between the school and KCP. During stage 1 and early in stage 2 of the development of KCP, school enrolment decreased and consequently empty rooms were made available to KCP. Subsequently, as school enrolment increased, rooms previously occupied by the project reverted to classrooms. The playroom, room 3, was dismantled and donated to another community project. The 'Three O'Clock School' continued to use the kitchen and classrooms. The sitting room, room 4, created for the SPACE project, was also dismantled and reclaimed as a classroom. At that point the SPACE programme had terminated. The furniture from this room went to the young women themselves.

In the mid phase of the project the committee gained more and more confidence in making decisions. KCP continued to run morning and evening classes, dances, and trips. Our committee member who facilitated the SPACE project reported to KCP committee on developments within that initiative.

All of our committee members were active adult learners in the morning and evening classes. One committee member continued to work as a voluntary tutor in the adult classes, a second facilitated the SPACE project, and another was a volunteer in the 'Three O'Clock School'. Another member took responsibility for opening and closing

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<sup>11</sup> Resources refers to the physical building, as well as equipment, knowledge, and skills.

the school. All members continued to encourage and recruit learners. They followed up on members who were overcoming personal tragedies, or had been ill, and encouraged them to reconnect with the classes. The committee met regularly to review and plan activities. We had a bank account in which we deposited the monies we raised or were donated. At this stage the committee also took responsibility for ‘the cheque book’.<sup>12</sup>

#### **6.4.2.4 Services**

The FÁS CE Scheme was initiated in the initial stage of KCP’s development. During stage 2 the FÁS CE Scheme developed significantly. In April 1991 the scheme employed four workers and a supervisor. The host school and another local Primary school collaborated as sponsors of the expanded FÁS CE Scheme. Subsequently, other local organisations including a family resource centre, local action centre, boxing club and two churches collaborated as sponsors for the FÁS CE Scheme. At its peak the scheme employed eighteen workers. Eight of the workers were located in the host school. They worked as caretakers, security workers, and as childcare workers in the crèche, pre-school and classrooms. The supervisor, a most wonderful woman, was a founder member of KCP, an active adult learner, and a local resident.

In the second stage the range of services located in the school increased. KCP continued to offer morning and evening classes to adults. The ‘Three O’Clock School’ offered children a rich programme of activities. The SPACE programme and the pre-school were established. Furthermore, with the support of the FÁS CE Scheme we provided a crèche for the SPACE project, and for the morning adult education classes.

It is important to see the services in the school in terms of an holistic learning and support package, rather than as individual services. During stage 2, I was Principal of the school, Director of KCP and sponsor of the FÁS CE Scheme.<sup>13</sup> Members of KCP committee held key positions in the FÁS CE Scheme and SPACE project. The FÁS CE Scheme offered services to the school, the pre-school and to KCP. The pre-school

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<sup>12</sup> We never had a lot of money. The ‘cheque book’ is signed by two committee members (I am not one of those signatories).

<sup>13</sup> The role of sponsor of the FÁS CE Scheme involved working with co-sponsors, supporting staff, attending meetings, and corresponding with FÁS.

operated subject to the Board of Management of the school. In my 1995 Principal's summer report to parents I profiled the successful year in the school and pre-school. It acknowledged the help of parents with school tours and sports days, and their support in general for the school. In this report I thanked the workers on the FÁS CE Scheme for their contribution to the school. Furthermore it announced the successful submission for renovation of the school building.

#### **6.4.2.5 Stage 2: Conclusion**

This was a very intensive phase of development. The school building was renovated, school enrolment grew, and we established the pre-school. There were also many developments within KCP. The morning and evening classes continued to thrive and the support programme of dances, trips and holidays continued. The 'Three O'Clock School' continued to offer children exciting learning opportunities. The SPACE project was also established. The pre-school was set up in room 5. The sitting room was set up in room 4, and subsequently dismantled. The FÁS Scheme grew substantially to offer employment to eighteen workers and one supervisor.

During this phase our much-loved caretaker, a woman in her seventies retired. A video of her retirement party, which took place in the school, shows the teachers, parents, and adult learners all enjoying each other's company. They sat in the 'sitting room' in an atmosphere comparable to a happy family gathering. There was singing, eating, story telling, and presentations. This was just one of the many gatherings and storytelling events which we enjoyed during this phase. Our celebrations helped to nurture a sense of identity and solidarity.

CLVEC continued to support KCP and to supply tutors. The committee continued to meet regularly to make decisions and plan activities.

#### **6.4.3 Stage 3: Walking with confidence: from 1998 to 2005**

The contemporary stage charts developments from 1998 to 2005. It profiles the activities and developments as well as the structures which enabled KCP to deliver and develop its services.



### **6.4.3.1 Kileely Community Project**

In 1998 I resigned as Principal in the host school, and went to work in Mary Immaculate College, a third level college aligned to the University of Limerick. I took up the position of Co-ordinator of the Targeting Educational Disadvantage Project, and did so on a part time basis. This arrangement enabled me to continue my voluntary work with KCP. A new Principal was appointed to the school. She was an existing staff member, and had worked in the school since 1992. She brought creativity, enthusiasm, and a commitment to community learning. She strongly supported the ethos of the KCP. She had seen first hand the impact of KCP on children and women's lives, and also the impact of KCP on the school. She was committed to supporting the work of KCP in her role as Principal. She also took up sponsorship of the FÁS CE Scheme. I remained Director of KCP, called to the school, and met with the committee on a regular basis. As the Principal was a teaching Principal, she was allocated a number of administrative days, during which she could appoint a substitute teacher to teach her class. I did that work for a number of years. During this time the school enrolment continued to grow, and new teachers were appointed. I sat on every interview panel over the next five years. During this period new housing was built by Limerick City Corporation in adjacent estates. The school grew to an eight-teacher school by 2005.

During stage 3 KCP committee continued to organise adult education classes, trips, and social events. The adult education programme grew to the extent that on several nights per week two classrooms, as well as the kitchen, were needed to accommodate evening adult education classes. There was a short-term space shortage, which meant that we had to suspend morning adult classes for a few months to permit the kitchen to be used as a classroom. However, the night classes and the 'Three O'Clock School' continued uninterrupted. The morning classes resumed as soon as a prefabricated building was installed. During this temporary phase some of the adult education classes, which were scheduled to run in the morning, ran at night to facilitate learners.

A number of our adult learners joined other community projects, and attended adult education classes not available in KCP. Small groups of women who had gone on holidays with the project organised short holidays independent of KCP, they even

went to Paris. During the summer, when adult classes had ceased, some adult learners continued to meet and go swimming or walking together. They continued to attend each other's family celebrations and supported each other through bereavements, and family tragedies.

The 'Three O'Clock School' continued to thrive during this time. It provided a rich programme two days per week. The participants were selected in consultation with teachers and parents. The CLVEC continued to supply tutors. Along with the longest serving tutor, I continued to take responsibility for tutor application hours and grant proposals to the CLVEC in respect of 'Three O'Clock School' requirements. As project Director, I met regularly with the Principal of the host school and with the 'Three O'Clock School' tutors to plan and review progress.

#### **6.4.3.2 Structures**

Throughout stage 3 the school and KCP continued to share resources and support each other's development. I was not on site on a daily basis, as I had been during stages 1 and 2. When I went to work with Mary Immaculate College, I told the committee that I would always be available to them, and would continue my involvement with KCP. While they acknowledged my intentions, they told me afterwards that they were doubtful that KCP could continue without my presence in the school. However, I did continue to be involved, hold meetings, search for funding and liaise with the school. The committee managed the classes on a day-to-day basis, made whatever decisions were necessary, and contacted me between meetings if necessary. The FÁS CE supervisor, a committee member was located in the school, and there was on-going support between committee members.

#### **6.4.3.3 Services**

During this phase, the host school grew to an eight-teacher school. KCP, the FÁS CE Scheme, and the pre-school were located in the host school. KCP continued to offer a menu of morning and evening classes, trips, holidays, and social events. The 'Three O'Clock School' continued to enrich children's lives. The school continued as sponsor in the FÁS CE Scheme until October 2005, when it terminated. The pre-school continued to thrive and was oversubscribed. The social services ceased

managing the pre-school service citywide, and the Board of Management of the school took responsibility of management of pre-school staff.

The combined services located in the school continued to offer an holistic programme to learners of all ages. The Principal continued in her role as sponsor of the FÁS CE Scheme, until it terminated in October 2005. She also continued to work closely with KCP, and attended review and planning meetings for the ‘Three O’Clock School’. The FÁS Scheme supervisor continued as a member of KCP committee. One of the tutors in the ‘Three O’Clock School’, and also a member of KCP committee, sat on the Board of Management of the host school. Another member of KCP committee volunteered as a classroom assistant, having previously worked with the FÁS CE Scheme. As one teacher I interviewed remarked, ‘ the school is not viewed as an educational place for children but as an educational place for adults also, and a fun place to learn’ (Teacher no.4). I continued in my capacity as Director KCP, and supported the host school in any way I could.

#### **6.4.3.4 Stage 3: Conclusion**

This section describes the third and final stage, of the development of KCP. This was the stage during which I conducted the primary research for this thesis. During this stage a new Principal was appointed. I went to work in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. The host school expanded to the extent that prefabricated buildings had to be erected. KCP continued to offer a programme of morning and evening classes, social events, trips, and holidays to adults. The ‘Three O’Clock School’ continued to support children’s learning. The pre-school was oversubscribed. The FÁS CE Scheme terminated at the end of this stage of development.

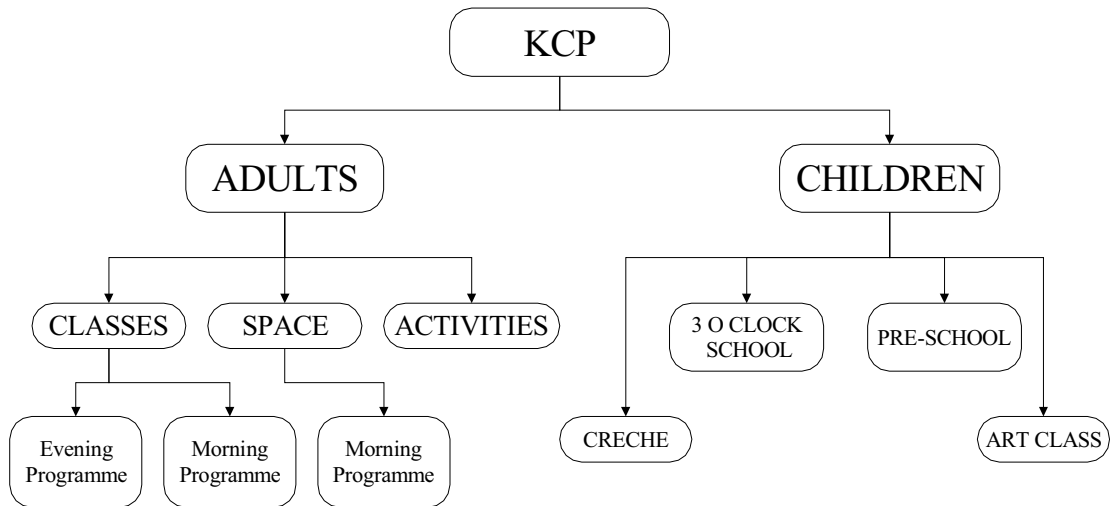
Many social and economic changes had occurred during the lifespan of KCP and these are profiled in Chapter Five, ‘Area Profile’. One of my research participants contrasted the quality of life for children in the mid 1980s with stage 3 of KCP’s development. She said that ‘the children are better fed, better dressed, and better educated’. Another research participant contrasted the material poverty at the initial stage when ‘women were pushing old buggies’, to the present situation where ‘now they are driving up in cars’. Another felt the ‘comfort zone’ in relation to material

goods had improved in the twenty years but there were still a lot of needs for both adults and children that deserved to be met. However, there is a long way to go before children and adults have all the support and resources needed to reach their potential.

## **6.5 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter traced the evolution of Kileely Community project over a twenty-year period. The twenty years, 1985 to 2005, was divided into three distinct phases of growth and development. These three phases profiled the changes that occurred not only for KCP, but also for the school community, and school building, the FÁS CE Scheme, and indeed my own working life.

KCP evolved from an eight-week programme designed to build parents' skills into a comprehensive community project. Over this period of time KCP offered adult education classes, a SPACE programme, pre-school, an after school project, and Saturday morning art classes. Furthermore it offered ancillary activities such as trips, holidays and dances. Figure 6.2 depicts the activities of Kileely Community Project over the twenty-year period. The activities are subdivided into adult and children focused initiatives. The adult activities include the morning and evening adult education classes, the SPACE project for young lone mothers and the 'activities' which arose as a result of the growing friendships, successes, and identified learner needs. The children focused activities include the 'Three O'Clock School', the crèche, pre-school, and Saturday morning art classes, all of which offered children of different ages a range of activities to support their learning.



**Figure 6.2 Activities of KCP**

During the summer months, when the classes ceased, adult education participants continued to meet, walk, and swim together. Two activities, the SPACE project and the Children’s Saturday morning art classes ran for a limited period of time. Other initiatives such as the morning and evening adult education classes and the ‘Three O’Clock School’ continued to grow, change, and develop. Throughout this twenty-year period, KCP committee remained committed to the growth and development of all aspects of learning, whether it related to the host school, or to KCP.

The FÁS CE Scheme grew from a single worker with myself as supervisor, to a parish initiative involving seven organisations, and employing eighteen workers. A member of KCP committee filled the position of FÁS CE supervisor. The FÁS CE Scheme provided support to the school, pre-school, and to KCP.

The Board of Management (BOM) was ultimately responsible for the various activities which took place in the school over the twenty-year period. The FÁS CE Scheme, KCP project, and the pre-school, are all subject to the Board of Management.

In the twenty year period described the school enrolment, teacher status, and physical building went through dramatic changes. There were three Principals of the school during this time period. The first, the Principal who had been my own principal when

I worked as a teacher in the school prior to setting up the project, encouraged me and supported the development of the project. When she retired, I replaced her as Principal. Finally, in 1998 when I went to work in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, a third Principal, a staff member who had worked in the school since 1992 took up the Principal's role. The school building went through massive renovation and in the latter years proved too small to cater for the numbers of children and range of activities.

Ultimately KCP evolved because we listened to each other, developed locally based decision-making structures, and successfully gained recognition as a community education provider, and acted to 'change our world'. The process of listening and responding to needs is at the core of this work. It is the engine which drove KCP for twenty years. In Chapter Eight, 'Celebrating the Survival, Success and Sustainability of Kileely Community Project, Excavating the Factors that Made Kileely Community Project Work', I excavate the factors which enabled this unique initiative to grow and develop.

KCP has evolved and grown in response to identified needs and within the resources available to it. The twenty-year period I have just described is best understood as a journey of hope.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **DID KILEELY COMMUNITY PROJECT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**





## **7. DID KILEELY COMMUNITY PROJECT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

### **7.1 Introduction**

*Life is an ocean, love is a boat  
In troubled waters , it keeps us afloat  
When we started the voyage there was just me and you  
Now gathered 'round us we have our own crew  
(Johnny Duhan)*

Kileely Community Project (KCP) profoundly affected the quality of people's individual and family lives. It radically transformed the way in which the host primary school functioned, and furthermore it impacted on the local community. KCP was established to address the learning needs of adults and children, and indeed my findings confirm that this was achieved. However, the impact of KCP extends well beyond addressing learning needs. This chapter excavates the impact of KCP on people and to a lesser extent on the three ecologies of home, school and community. It is informed by three theoretical fields. Firstly, it is informed by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory as it provides a framework for the interpretation of human needs. Secondly, it is informed by the literature on resilience, and finally by the Dynamics of Success framework. I will begin with a brief review of the literature and then proceed to share my primary research findings.

It is noteworthy that baseline data was not collected in the mid 1980s when KCP began. Therefore no pre-recorded data bank exists against which to measure the impact of KCP. It is crucial therefore to gain an understanding of the context and circumstances in which KCP evolved in order to fully appreciate the impact it made. Preceding chapters have contributed to building this understanding. Chapter Five, 'Area Profile', described the socio-economic, cultural, and educational context in which this project grew. Chapter Six, 'Journey of Hope: Transference, Transition and Transformation', described the nature and evolution of the various strands within the project, and traced the incremental process by which the various strands evolved. This chapter, based on my primary research, contributes further to contextualising this study.

Research participants regularly compared their lives prior to, and subsequent to, their involvement with KCP in an effort to express the impact it had on their lives, and on the individual ecologies of home, school, and community. This comparative discourse

informed the study in two ways. While firstly it acknowledged the impact of the project, it also facilitated an insight into the prevailing circumstances, both personal and contextual, in which the project evolved.

## **7.2 Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory**

The socio-ecological framework presented in Chapter Two, 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility' is inspired by the scholarship of capital theorists such as Bourdieu, Coleman, Putman, and Lin, and ecological theorist Bronfenbrenner. The socio-ecological framework offers a tool to interpret the layers of complexity in the person's lived environment. This was facilitated through an exploration of the literature in relation to the influence of place, relationships, time, culture, and capital on the accessibility of learning. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory offers a framework to analyse layers of human need, and is a useful tool to interpret the impact of KCP on the individual.

Maslow's hierarchy begins at a basic Physiological level of food, drink, and shelter and ascends to Safety at both a physical and psychological level. The next stage in the hierarchy is that of Belonging and Love which recognises our need for acceptance and affection. This is followed by Esteem, where the person experiences approval and competence and finally to Self Actualisation, an adult level of competence, the seeds of which can be fostered in the child through encouraging problem solving, promoting individual growth, and developing a sense of responsibility. (Appendix H. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, 1954).

According to Maslow's theory the person must have their needs met at the basic level to enable their development at successively higher levels, he posits that 'a person who is lacking food, safety, love, and esteem would most probably hunger for food more strongly than for anything else' (1954: 37). This thesis is concerned with factors affecting the accessibility of learning, and this framework informs this work on two levels. Firstly, on an individual level, it facilitates inquiry into levels of human need, thus facilitating reflection on how they are met and resourced. Secondly, since this thesis has embraced a socio-ecological stance, Maslow's framework facilitates reflection on the impact of unmet needs across contexts. For example, one of the reasons commonly cited for parents not becoming actively involved in supporting

their children's learning relates to socio-economic issues and family stress issues. For some families in poor socio economic circumstances an enormous amount of time and energy is expended on meeting basic needs, thus leaving little time or energy to address higher needs, including educational support. According to Kellaghan et al. 'when economic limitations leave families with no resources beyond those needed for survival, it is obvious that children will not be in a position to benefit fully from educational provision' (1995:30).

### **7.3 Resilience theory**

Our capacity as human beings to survive in hostile environments, our ability to respond to life's challenges and to adjust to life's circumstances is indeed awe inspiring. There are numerous examples of individuals 'whose lives expose them to diverse kinds of physical and psychic risk ... 'who defy the odds', and go on to lead conventionally-defined 'successful lives' (Howard et al., 1999:317). Some of us emerge from very challenging contexts as confident, competent, caring human beings. What is it that enables one person to emerge more intact than another? Resilience, defined by Gilligan as 'a set of qualities that helps a person to withstand many of the negative effects of adversity' (2001:5) offers one probable explanation. There is an increasing body of literature that looks at resilience characteristics within the individual as a mechanism for transcending high-risk environments. This signifies a move from an emphasis on researching deficit characteristics to one which focuses on 'assets of individuals and systems' (Howard et al., 1999:309).

The literature indicates that protective factors in the home, school, and community have the potential to build resilience in the individual. According to France and Utting, protective factors include 'strong social bonds between children, their families, schools, and communities; and whether they [children] receive positive rewards and responses from adults who offer them a model of positive behaviour' (2005:80). It is my belief and indeed part of the findings of this study that resilience can be nurtured in both children and adults. Firstly I will explore and define resilience with references to the individual, and subsequently explore the ecological factors which impact on resilience.

### **7.3.1 Resilient traits in the individual**

Resilient characteristics enable the individual to deal with adversity, have greater control over their lives, and to have a greater ability to define and meet goals with consequent results for educational attainment. Fraser et al. identify three specific resilience characteristics. Firstly, ‘overcoming the odds – being successful despite exposure to high risk’. Secondly, ‘sustaining competence under pressure – adapting to high risk’; and finally, ‘recovering from trauma – adjusting successfully to negative life events’ (1999:136). Howard et al. propose a dualistic manifestation of resilience. Firstly they identify protective factors as the combination of the ‘internal assets’ of the individual and secondly as the ‘external strengths occurring within systems in which the individual grows and develops’ (1999:310). Internal factors include ‘social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose and a future’ (ibid:311), all of which resonate with higher levels within Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. I will now explore external factors located in the ecologies of home, school, and community which foster resilience in the individual.

### **7.3.2 Home, school, and community factors which build resilience**

In this section I offer a brief discussion on the capacity of the three ecologies to build resilient traits in the individual. Each of the ecologies holds the potential to provide the protective, nurturing, stable environment in which an individual can build resilience.

#### **7.3.2.1 Resilience: Home ecology**

The home environment is the primary location in which resilience may be fostered. According to Howard et al. ‘the consistency, and quality of care and support the child experiences during infancy, childhood, and adolescence’ build resilient characteristics in the young person (1999:312). Drawing on the work of Gilligan, Hammen, Rosenthal and others, Seaman et al. compiled ‘a broad inventory of factors’, which may ‘insulate against challenges to growing up satisfactorily that arise in circumstances of disadvantage’ (2005:7). These characteristics include:

Family environments characterised by warmth, responsiveness and stimulation; provision of adequate and consistent role models; harmony between parents; spending time with children; promoting constructive use of leisure and community networks; consistent guidance and structure and rules during adolescence (2005:7).

The capacity of the home environment to develop resilience is dependent on a number of factors, including parental attributes and the prevalence of capital resources in its varied forms. These factors are discussed in detail in Chapter Two, 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility'.

### **7.3.2.2 Resilience: School ecology**

The school also holds the potential to build resilience in young people. This is particularly important for young people whose home life does not effectively nurture resilient characteristics. According to Howard et al. the quality of the school environment and the school ethos are pertinent to this discussion, 'children in discordant and disadvantaged homes are more likely to demonstrate resilient characteristics if they attend schools that have good academic records and attentive caring teachers' (1999:312). Howard et al., with reference to the work of Rutter, contend that the school has the capacity to become an effective site for the development of resilience in its students. They posit that resilience is fostered when students have 'positive experiences that are associated with either success or pleasure', and get a chance to take responsibility, and 'develop good relationships with a teacher or a social success among classmates' (ibid:313).

Howard et al. in their quest to identify specific school traits which build resilience draw our attention to the Minneapolis Public Schools Project. This initiative identified five school-based strategies designed to build resilience in pupils. Firstly, they contend that 'schools, through their personnel should offer opportunities for students to develop significant relationships with caring adults' (1999:315). Secondly, 'schools should build on social competencies and academic skills' (ibid:315). Thirdly, schools should offer opportunities for meaningful involvement. Fourthly, 'schools should work to identify, collaborate with and coordinate support services for children and youth' (ibid: 315). Finally, they suggest that schools should look at their own structures and policies and ensure that they 'do not add to the risks already faced by students' (ibid: 315). The capacity of the school environment to affect learning

accessibility is discussed in detail in Chapter Two, 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility'.

### **7.3.2.3 Resilience: Community ecology**

In high risk community contexts young people must develop the skills to survive, not only at a physical level, but also at an emotional and psychological level.

Communities differ, and 'children in disadvantaged areas are generally considered more at risk than those in affluent communities' (Howard et al., 1999:313).

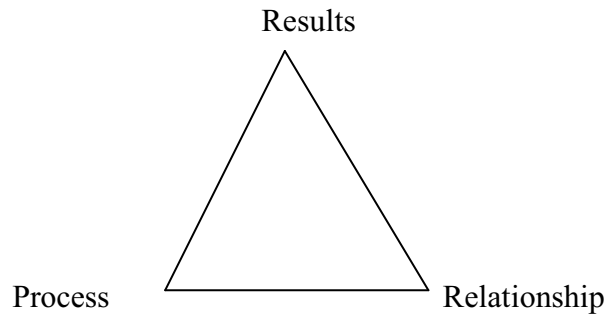
Communities which offer supportive, safe, stimulating places to grow and develop nurture the growth of resilient characteristics in young people. Strong social networks, close alignment between needs and services, and good infrastructure can all contribute to building resilient characteristics in the young. Community characteristics are also discussed at length in Chapter Two, 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility', and is pertinent to this discussion.

The home, school, and community ecologies have the potential to build resilience. They do this through the provision of caring, safe, nurturing environments where children experience warm stable relationships with adults and with their peers.

## **7.4 Dynamics of success**

This study is concerned with understanding the impact of KCP on individuals and ecologies over time. One of the ways in which I conceptualise the impact is in terms of aspects or indeed dimensions of success. The Interaction Associates propose an evaluation tool, 'Dimensions of Success', which enables reflection and measurement of success in terms of relationships, processes, and results. I adapted this analytical tool for this study, and renamed it 'The Dynamics of Success'. KCP was and is successful. The 'Dynamics of Success' framework enables exploration of factors which contributed to building and maintaining that success.

## Dynamics of Success



**Figure 7.1** Dynamics of success

In the context of this study *Results* are understood as short term and long term outcomes for individuals, contexts, and services. Results are understood in terms of outcomes for participants and researcher, in terms of outcomes from involvement with KCP over a prolonged period of time. *Relationships* are understood in terms of the quality and nature of relationships that were formed between individuals, and between individuals and services, as a consequence of involvement with KCP. An examination of Relationships is also a key site of investigation in terms of understanding the impact of the project on participant's lives. *Process* is understood in terms of how KCP functioned to identify, deliver, and evaluate services for adults and children.

There is a natural synergy between this model and the Feminist Emancipatory Research paradigm as outlined in Chapter Three 'Methodology: Beyond Tools of Inquiry'. Both recognise the centrality of relationship, process, and outcomes. Adaptation of the model demands that these elements are acknowledged in their own right and also in the interconnectedness between them.

### 7.5 Theoretical summary

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a framework with which to interpret the needs of the individual, while we might hope that significant numbers of children have access to the supports necessary to meet those needs, some of our children grow in harsh high-risk environments which damage them in many ways. Yet, against the

odds, some manage to survive and take their place in society. Their ability to overcome life's challenges can, to some extent, be understood in terms of their levels of resilience. Finally, the Dynamics of Success framework is applied loosely, with due respect for, and recognition of the complexity of understanding human needs, achievements, and success.

On numerous occasions during the interview process I was struck by the intensity of feelings and emotions which participants held and shared in relation to their involvement with KCP. I can only hope that in the remainder of this chapter I manage to share some of that richness with you and that you can begin to appreciate the potential impact we can make on each other's lives.

## **7.6 Impact on individuals**

Individuals are divided into the target group, i.e. people for whom KCP delivered services, and the non-target group, which included tutors, teachers, ancillary staff and supporters. In this section I describe the impact of KCP on the lives of the target group. The target group is made up of adult learners, 'Three O'Clock School' participants and SPACE participants. The research participants are profiled in Chapter Four, 'Data Sources and Collection Process'.

### **7.6.1 Adult learners: The wheel turns**

I interviewed eleven young adult learners individually and three of these subsequently attended a focus group interview. I also interviewed thirteen mature adult learners of whom four also attended for a focus group interview. The mature adult learners were typically women who had joined the classes in the mid eighties and early nineties, and the younger women had been involved for an average of seven years. The vast majority of the adult learners were early school leavers and parents. Their life styles, prior to involvement with KCP, were typically home based, with primary responsibility for home making, and raising the children. If they were in employment it was typically low paid, part-time work, in the service industries. Many women described a typical week in terms of doing housework, raising the kids, and going to mass at weekends. They did not belong to any clubs or organisations, beyond church based groups like the confraternity. The process was transformative, in the voice of one adult learner 'It was like the wheel was turning. I was getting a second chance in



a way ... You know what I mean ... I was getting a second chance to improve myself, as well as my children (Young adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 2).

### **7.6.1.1 Adult learners' relationships: Good to one another, good for one another**

An understanding into the nature and quality of relationships has a major part to play in gaining an appreciation the factors that made KCP successful. Adult learners who were interviewed for this study spoke insightfully of the relationships they had with co-learners, tutors, teachers, and children.

#### **7.6.1.1.1 Adult learners' relationships: Among adult learners**

Research participants vividly described relationships with their peers, their tutors,<sup>1</sup> with the teachers and children in the school, and with KCP committee. Ultimately, they were describing the growth of social capital in the form of networks, trust and solidarity, and the growth of human capital in the form of knowledge and skills. They described how their social and academic needs were met, and how the experience of belonging in a supportive group built their skills and resilience. But let their voices speak:

[adult learners] all get on very well. Any of the women I know. They are all they are all good to one another, and good for one another. They are too. If you have a problem you can discuss it. They will listen to you and get a bit of advice. There is always someone there to give you a bit of advice, whether you want to do it privately afterwards, or in the group. They are always there to help (Mature adult learner no. 2).

As adult learners shared learning experiences, went on trips, and socialised together, the quality of relationships between adults changed from acquaintances to deep friendships. Solidarity grew among participants as they actively supported each other in their learning and beyond in the joys and tragedies, which they and their families experienced. Solidarity and friendship were nurtured in the adult classes, where the ethos was one of sharing and support, in the words of one tutor:

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term tutor to refer to teachers in KCP, whether in the adult or child strands. The term teacher refers to the teachers in the school.

...great craic [fun] about the sharing. You have a great craic with it. Last week one of the women, she was having ... her sister's boy was 18. Her sister had died, and they were doing a party for him. So everyone pitched in on Friday morning and made quiches, and helped her out in that way. So she had 3 or 4 quiches. And she had to go away then, because she had work to go to. And she left us the key [to her house] to drop down her stuff. And when she came back, she said she was very disappointed ... "Ye never cleared off the table, after leaving ye the key" ... They totally trust ... over the years ...mixing and talking. That's how trust grows. They get to know you, and you know ... Then you wouldn't do anything wrong to them or anything. And I find that they are great to help, and especially if someone is in trouble. You always find they are always there (Tutor no. 2).

Another tutor noted the frankness of relationships between the women who were described as 'experienced worldly women, who have a different perspective on life from me, and from each other. And we draw on each other, and they certainly draw on each other within the classes' (Tutor no. 1). Yet again, the solidarity and support between learners was acknowledged:

The frankness is unreal. There is that sense of confidence in the group. That's just another aspect of their lives you can build on. We can contribute if someone has a problem, open it up, and we will take a look at it, if that's what you want, if you are comfortable with that. Advice comes left right and centre, good bad and indifferent. But at least you have someone to talk to about it. ... You are not alone, that's an important part of it (Tutor no. 1).

#### **7.6.1.1.2 Adult learners' relationships: 'Three O'Clock School' mothers**

Solidarity and friendship was also built among the mothers who attended the 'Three O'Clock School'. As they worked together to enhance the learning of all children, they formed adult friendships. One of the women who had never previously been involved in any community activity said that 'when I started to go down to the 'Three O'Clock School', I met people down there that was like myself. They started to talk to me, so I made friends there like (Mature adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 1).

It must be remembered that many of the women were early school leavers, with negative school experiences. One of the challenges in the early years was to 'reinvent' the school so that it was embraced as a community resource, where people felt welcome, and where adults and children were encouraged to access learning opportunities. In the following extract, an adult learner captures the ethos of those early days, and depicts the backdrop against which the project was developing:

When I went down, they [tutors and other adult learners] were so understandable. They were listening to what you were saying. They were not saying, 'Ah you shut up, go away, you know nothing'. It was all different, compared to my own school like (Mature adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 1).

One participant described the ethos in the adult education classes, where 'funny', that is peculiar, incidents from the home are shared in confidence. Respect is manifested through confidentiality, and a sense of solidarity and equality:

If you said something funny happened in your house, it's only a big joke. Its not going to be discussed around, it's only around the table ... if its am ... They all respect you for what you are. And there is none of us better than anyone else. None of us has nothing. Only ordinary homes. None of us is wealthy, do you know what I mean ... All equal. All of us. None of us is better off than one another. We have very little as you know yourself Ann, very little (Mature adult learner no. 2).

The lack of competition among the women and the ethos of sharing and enjoying each other's company was evident from very early on in the development of KCP. A tutor from the early years described the atmosphere as follows:

There was no sense of competition. None of it. And yet they were working very hard, and they were enjoying one another's development. The atmosphere I remember was warm, and very enjoyable you know (Tutor no. 4).

### **7.6.1.1.3 Adult learners' relationships: Adult learners and tutors**

The project ethos and atmosphere was certainly influenced by the nature of relationship between the adult learners. It is also influenced by the nature of the relationship between the tutor and the adult learners. The participants described this relationship as warm, and in contrast to previous experiences, it was affirming, and acknowledged their prior knowledge and experiences. The nature of relationship and pedagogy built resilience, confidence, and skills. Learning was described as an interactive experience between all stakeholders:

The formal structure as we would know it, teachers teach and students learn, is not applied here. It's a case of teacher says, "What do you think"? And, "Does it suit"? And if not, "Is there another way we can make it suit"? And I think that's important, that you must take on board, there is more than one way to learn (Tutor no. 1).

The following extract, from the mature adult learners focus group, confirms the relationship between adults and tutors as one of friendship and support:

Voice 1: They are not like tutors at all. They are our friends

Voice 2: Friends

Voice 3: It's not a bit like children going into a classroom with a teacher. It's not a bit like that. Well you wouldn't expect it to be either. But you don't come in nervous, and you don't come in saying, "Oh God, the teacher is this or the teacher is that". All the teachers here are excellent. And you can tell em anything, ask em anything.

The close relationship between adult learners and tutors is evident to non-participating adults. An ancillary member of staff commented on the lack of class distinction. This phenomenon while named in different ways such as 'no hierarchy', 'all on the same level' surfaced regularly during the interview process:

I don't think there is any distinction between teachers and people [adult learners]. Cos they are just on the same level, instructors, teachers, whatever they might be. It's just like home from home. That's my opinion anyway. Cos over the years I have seen it. Cos there is no one ... no class distinction between them (Ancillary staff no. 1).

#### **7.6.1.1.4 Adult learners' relationships: Adult learners and teachers**

The relationship between teachers and adult learners is a distinctive feature which contributes to the overall ethos and ambiance within the school. Adult learners are sometimes parents of children in the school, as well as members of the local or extended community. Adult learners described their relationships with teachers in terms of their role as parents, and as adult learners using the school as their learning base. One adult learner, a parent of a child in the school, described the nature of relationships between parents and teachers, by comparing it to her experiences with other schools. She highlights the accessibility and approachability of teachers in the host school. She shared a common space, the kitchen, with teachers, whom she met on a daily basis, and with whom she spoke on first name terms:

There is no warmth in the other schools. It's just you just drop your kids in, and that's it. There's no talking to teachers, no nothing, you know. You have to make an appointment to see one. Whereas when you are dropping your children in here, if you have a problem you just say, "Can we talk for a minute"? You know, and it's sorted. There's no waiting around. You can talk straight away if there is a problem. And if they have a problem, they will tell you straight away. The teacher will approach you, when they didn't in other schools. They wait until you had your parent teacher meeting, and then tell you. It could take six months before you knew there was a problem in the school. I found that now (Young adult learner no. 2).

Other adult learners, while not parents of children in the school at the time of research, were loud in their praise of the teachers. They felt the teachers made them welcome, and were obviously comfortable with the presence of parents in the school.

There is sometimes an overlap of a few minutes between the end of an adult class, and the beginning of teacher break times. It is at this point that there might be interaction between teachers and adult learners. Teachers and adult learners might also interact when they were arriving at or leaving the school. Not only did participants comment on the nature of relationships between the teachers and themselves, but they were also conscious of the quality of relationships between all staff working in the school, in whatever capacity. It is evident from the following description, and that of other participants, that the children in the school also related positively to the adult learners:

The teachers come in there for their break, and they just talk away to you. Do you know what I mean. Free and easy? They are all nice as well, the girls who look after the children, [Special Needs Assistants] and the teachers. They are all sitting down having their tea together. You know what I mean? They are all in the kitchen talking and it's 5 or 6 minutes. Its nice, we're there. We're cleaning up, and they are making tea, and whatever. All talking about the weekend and their holidays and whatever. It is nice ... and all the little children say "Hello" to you when they are passing. Sure you know that yourself Ann (Mature Adult learner no. 2).

Both KCP committee focus group, and the mature adult learners focus group acknowledged the genuine interest of teachers in the adult education classes. They also spoke of the sense of equality which prevailed between the teachers and adult learners. This is how KCP committee focus group described the relationship between teachers and adult learners:

All: Excellent

Voice 1: Because they never stand in your way so they don't ... And they are very interested in what goes on in here and ... I mean if they weren't agreeable, we wouldn't be in here in the first place

Voice 2: We wouldn't be in here

Voice 3 There is no 'them and us'. I would say like. That has to be the main thing ... The teachers in this school ... It is a very open, and very friendly, and everybody ... There is no, am, "We are teachers, and ye are coming to a class" ... So they have gelled very well with the people coming along. They have built up a good relationship.

#### **7.6.1.1.5 Adult learners' relationships: Teachers and adult learners**

According to the teachers the presence of adult learners contributes to the ethos, atmosphere, and general 'feel good' factor in the school. Teachers sometimes use the presence of parents as a motivational tool for children. They send children down to the kitchen where the adult classes are in progress to show off their work, or to get a

freshly baked scone from their mother who is participating in the adult education class:

...every so often we might send somebody down [to the kitchen]. Conscious that somebody's mother was down there. You would send somebody down there with some work that was done. Recently, one of the kids in my class said, "Can I go down and get a scone from my mam"? ... And he did, and brought one for me too. So the children know it's going on as well you know. Oh to have their mam or their dad in the school is a wonderful thing. They feel very proud of it you know (Teacher no. 2).

#### **7.6.1.1.6 Adult learners' relationships: Adult learners and children**

Teachers felt that children enjoyed the presence of adult learners in the school. They believed the transformation of the school into a multi-service building facilitated the development of respect among adults and children. Since a variety of adults and children in their various capacities use the school, and the toilets are located at each end of the school, it is inevitable that adult learners and children come into contact. This happens as children travel between classrooms, visit toilets, meet on arrival at school, or on the way to yard. One young mother described the respectful relationship between the adults and children as follows:

It teaches the adult to respect the child, and the child to respect the adult in return. Because they are watching the little kids, and they meet them, and they know them. They get to know them over the years. There is respect for the child, and there is respect back from the child, because they are being respected in the first place (Young adult learner no. 4).

In the following extract, a teacher offers an insight into the informal interaction between children and adult learners, and highlights the respect in which the children are held:

If one of the ones in the classes [adult learners] meet one of the kids on the way to the toilet, there is a big conversation the whole way down the corridor. It is brilliant. They talk to them. Because there is a lot of people who come into different schools and bypass a child, and not even say "Hello", do you know what I mean? There is not one person in any of these classes that would ... They always acknowledge the child, no matter who the child is, do you know what I mean. Even saying "Hello", or giving the child a bit of praise, or talking to the child about something, if they know them. You know they always talk to every child they see (Teacher no. 4).

The relationship between adult learners and children extends beyond the school. The following anecdote, shared by a mature adult learner, highlights how a learning space shared by a grandmother and a young child creates a shared experience. It also portrays how the child, even at such a young age, has internalised a sense of

ownership of the school. Smiling at the innocence of her grandchild she relates the conversation between them:

The kids say there is a beautiful smell out of our kitchen every Thursday and Friday. “Oh Nan”, they said, “There is a beautiful smell out of your kitchen. Your kitchen they say” (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 3).

#### **7.6.1.2 Adult learners’ results: Solidarity, skills, stories**

When adult learners were asked to identify specific outcomes of their involvement in KCP they listed the development of specific skills, academic achievements, improved health, enhanced lifestyle, a sense of solidarity, and a greater sense of identity with the community.

While at all times acknowledging the importance of academic achievements, of ‘trying to educate themselves a bit more’, research participants believed that to focus on academic achievements, as either a priority, or as the highest form of achievement, would be to do a disservice to an holistic and realistic vision for learning. The impact on adult learners lives, and specifically within the context in which KCP developed was also evident to people who worked in the school, as the following teacher interview shows:

At that time [the mid and late 1980s] also, woman’s role as homemaker, not to mention her contribution to society at large, was still undervalued. The KCP gave women in the area a sense of self-worth, by giving them the opportunity, not only to discover that other women shared their lifestyle, but also their opinions, aspirations, desire for friendship with like-minded people, for a better life. It also gave them practical advice on household management (hence the enticing aroma of cooked dinners in the school), improved skills such as sewing and knitting, and most important the ability to read and decipher all the signs and symbols of modern day life, through adult literacy programmes (Teacher no. 5).

#### **7.6.1.2.1 Adult learners’ results: Learning with pride**

Adult learners spoke of the joy at learning specific skills such as cookery, sewing, hairdressing, literacy, personal health, as well as computer and musical skills. This skill development impacted not only on them personally, but also on their family contexts. The women shared a great sense of pride in their achievements, and in their ability to learn. One mature adult learner sat comfortably on her armchair and reviewed her achievements. As her granddaughter listened to us she proudly spoke of her deep sense of self-wonder at developing skills:

I done things I never thought I'd be able to do in me life. That particular year like, I never thought I'd be able to swim, or be able to do anything. I love it, every minute of it (Mature adult learner no. 1).

Women are proud in their roles as active learners. The following extract is from a young adult learner whose children are all school going. She does not take too kindly to being seen as a 'lady of leisure', but has pride in her learning. In her interview she shared her delight that her learning was in the context of her children's school. She believed that this provided a model of lifelong learning for her children:

People say, "You are a lady of leisure in the mornings now. You don't work". I say, "Excuse me. I'm going to school". I tell them I am sewing, or cooking, or doing computer classes (Young adult learner no. 1).

#### **7.6.1.2.2 Adult learners' results: Academic achievements recognised and celebrated**

Academic achievements were also listed as important personal outcomes. A number of adult learners had completed state exams, both Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate. They were very proud of their achievements. Some participants had also achieved FETAC<sup>2</sup> awards. KCP celebrated and recognised these achievements at our annual social events by presenting our members with flowers and a small gift:

A lot of people left school feeling not deprived of an education, but deprived of their dignity, Ann. You know a lot of them were treated very badly in schools. And I don't mean in a physical sense. Because, physically you get over it. But you never get over being brow beaten in a way. And maybe being told you were stupid. And being told you won't do much in this life, you know (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 2).

#### **7.6.1.2.3 Adult learners' results: Intergenerational learning, sharing the joy and the hunger to learn**

Teachers, tutors, and mature and young adult learners highlighted the intergenerational learning impact of KCP. Adults learned skills and brought them back into the home environment and shared them with family members. Participants spoke not only of skills but also the positive attitudes and aspirations which they brought back into their family homes. In the following extract from the young adult learner focus group, participants shared the impact that their own return to study had on their children:

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<sup>2</sup> Further Education and Training Awards Council.



Voice 1: They are proud of me going to school  
 Voice 2 My kids are proud of me too  
 Researcher: How?  
 Voice 2: With my studying, [child] said “Mam are you studying again”? They would leave me alone like. Not tormenting me every two minutes  
 Voice 1: When they see you studying, they will actually study too  
 Voice 3: It’s a normal thing to do like  
 Voice 2: [child] is 13, and starting in Secondary school. She is settling down to studying a lot better, and the grades have come up. I have the papers there, I gave her the Junior Certificate papers. And I said “Look, you’ll be doing this in two years time. Now you have the papers here. You know what they will be looking for. Snap out of it now, and be doing it over the summer”. And she is working away. If she is stuck, she will come to me, and I am actually able to help her as well  
 Voice 3: God that is huge. Huge.  
 Voice 2: That’s great, especially with the maths  
 Voice 2: Especially in Secondary school cos [child] is going into 5<sup>th</sup>, and there is some of his maths....

#### **7.6.1.2.4 Adult learners’ results: Transformative outcomes, adults claiming their voices in the world**

There was a strong personal and social dimension to involvement with KCP. One of the tutors I interviewed spoke passionately of the transformative effect she witnessed in women. She believed they claimed their voices in the world beyond KCP as a result of the confidence they built from being part of a social network which supported but did not judge them:

The biggest thing about the community project was it gave the parents a voice. And they felt they were entitled to a voice. And I think it stretched out into the community. Like when they go to the doctor or when they go anywhere now a lot of women know they are entitled to a service. That they are not going to be spoken down to ... But they are not. You can see it. You can see the difference in them now. (Tutor no. 3).

#### **7.6.1.2.5 Adult learners’ results: Nurturing confidence and resilience**

The opportunity to interact in a warm, friendly, non-threatening learning environment with your co-learners, fostered self confidence, resilience, and built close supportive relationships and networks, as one young woman related ‘down here [in the school] its like a comfort blanket to me’. Another young adult learner put her head to one side, and after a couple of moments silence said ‘ Sure if I didn’t come here things could have been very different. Think of it. It was the best thing I ever done to come down here week after week’. These supportive relationships were a keystone in many women’s lives. In the interviews participants contrasted the isolation they had previously experienced, with the joy of involvement in a supportive learning

environment. Indeed leaving the family home, the routine of family life, and becoming involved in KCP, was named as an achievement in itself. Meeting regularly and learning together built solidarity and resilience:

People have got into very personal relationships anyway, once they got involved in the project. Particularly involved in the project and with their neighbours. A lot of the time most of us would not have realised the sad things happening in peoples lives. Marriages breaking down, children being in trouble, and things like that. So a lot of the achievement for people, was to be able to get out, to talk. To be able to say to someone, “My husband is beating me up”, or “My son is taking drugs”, or whatever it might be. And there was always an ear without a judgment. So that is a great achievement for people ... We are always going to have people who want to do academic stuff, which is great. The other side of it, the relief on someone able to share a problem.... (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 2).

#### **7.6.1.2.6 Adult learners’ results: Building solidarity and social capital**

Prior to the development of KCP there were no opportunities available within the community for involvement in any type of adult education classes. Lack of economic, cultural and social capital inhibited women from accessing learning opportunities available city-wide. I clearly remember calling to homes and convincing women that they had the right to take time for themselves, time to learn new skills, and time to have fun. Coming out of the home, into a supportive learning environment built solidarity, and social capital, as social networks were formed as a consequence of involvement with KCP:

When I got involved it took the focus off myself. Because you can get too focused on yourself, as well, and on your problems. And basically when you do have a problem, you think you are the only one in this world that has one. Now when you go out, and get involved in a community, you realise, well I am not alone. There are other people and they have problems, some are less, and some are more than yours. And sometimes it’s easier to sit down and talk to people and realise that ... Yes let’s help each other. So yes, it does take the focus off yourself. It was major. (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 2) .

#### **7.6.1.2.7 Adult learners’ results: Meeting personal, physical and mental health needs**

The research participants acknowledged their desire to learn, and to achieve. Sometimes this learning involved the development of specific skills. But the desire to learn, and indeed the hunger to learn was also highlighted:

I knew in all the classes I ever did, and all the exams I ever sat, it was not to prove ... I knew it was too late for me for a job, or a career or whatever. But look what it does for yourself. I can sit and have conversations. I can sit and know what people are talking about (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 1).

Mature adult learners were very aware of the needs of younger women. They believed younger women had a lot to gain from attending KCP, not only in terms of skill development, but also in terms of improving their quality of life:

I love to see the younger women coming along, and being like we were. And swop their stories and swop their problems. They might be different, and some of them might be the same. But I'd still like to think that they could do that. And laugh, the way we laughed. And forget their troubles, for one couple of hours. And to be delighted in what they have achieved. Whether it would be something they made, or something they cooked, or a sum they did, or a poem that they wrote, or understood something in a book. Whatever it is, just that it makes their lives that little bit better (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 1).

Research participants spoke of the value of KCP to their physical and mental well-being. As one woman said 'I can run up and down the stairs now without losing my breath. And sure, we done the mini marathon last year' (Mature adult learner no. 1). Participants spoke of the 'release' they felt, at being involved in a group where they had the opportunity to share their problems, and see their lives in perspective. As one woman noted, 'It was a release, do you know what I mean. Oh it was, it saved my sanity it did, it was brilliant it was' (Young adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 2). Finally, one young woman who had become a mother at a young age described the profound impact KCP made on her life. She lost the shame she carried and very successfully integrated into a community of learners:

I would never have had the confidence to go out there and make friends. And there was a shame with that. Not that any one made me feel ashamed. But I felt ashamed. Cos I was so young. And when I went into Kileely school the first thing I thought was, 'Oh God they are all going to be looking down their nose at me'. And when I went in there not one of them ... Sure I palled with some of their daughter. And I think if I had not gone into Kileely school I would always have carried that shame. But when I went into Kileely school and people treated me like I was a human being I overcame all that (Young adult learner no. 4).

### **7.6.1.3 Adult learners' process: Learning, laughing, and drinking tea**

The impact of KCP on adult learners can finally be understood in terms of process. This involves understanding how adults became involved, and stayed involved with KCP. As previously noted, KCP offered a community learning experience which was new and even counter-cultural to learner's previous experiences. Involvement with KCP offered the opportunity to participate in classes, be part of the committee, go on

trips, socialise, contribute to the host school, and to the local community. The welcome people experienced along with the inclusive open door policy, are all contributory aspects of a subtle inclusive process. This process builds on people's strengths, respects their privacy, and celebrates their achievements. The sense of solidarity which was built among the learners, as they developed skills, and formed friendships, all contributed to the process of engagement. It helped to build a sustainable project where previously no such facility was available:

I didn't feel intimidated, I suppose by people I thought were better than me. Cos we were all in the same group. And we were all learning the same things. And maybe, I might have been a bit slower than someone else in grasping things. But I came out good at the end of it you know. Oh it was brilliant Ann. The best thing that ever happened to Kileely. That's was it was now for a lot of us (Young adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 2).

#### **7.6.1.3.1 Adult learners' process: Pedagogy, it is about the way we learn together**

The pedagogy in the adult classes enabled learners to identify their learning needs, engage in learning at their own pace, and support each other in a non competitive environment. As one tutor put it, 'it's not about what I want to do. It's really about what they want to do, you know. It is really about what they want to do' (Tutor no. 2). Both mature and young adult learners described the interactive atmosphere and pedagogy in the adult classes as being one of the primary reasons for sustained involvement, and indeed attainment. According to the adult learners their prior knowledge was recognised, and their learning needs explored, in an atmosphere conducive to sharing and learning:

If someone walked in off the street they would sit there and try to work out who was the teacher. Cos we are all kind of family, and it is not like "I'm the teacher, you do this, and you do that" and ... It's not a case of that. Like years ago, when we went to school they are just so ... To me the teachers [tutors] are part of the class that's basically it ... They are just part of the class. They are not above it or... I know they are in charge (SPACE participant and young adult learner no. 1)

#### **7.6.1.3.2 Adult learners' process: Recruiting and welcoming learners**

Potential adult learners were strongly encouraged to attend classes, as well as to engage with identifying what they specifically would like to learn. Posters advertising classes were displayed in the school corridor, and read by parents or carers, as they dropped their children to school and pre-school. Classes were also advertised by word

of mouth, and adult learners including committee members, actively encouraged other adults to become involved:

Along the corridor someone might say, "I heard there was a class going here". And I will tell you something now, they are nearly handcuffed to come in [to the kitchen] at that stage. Because we are only delighted. And this is it you see. And then people feel very welcome. No one is fobbing them off and saying, "It might be full", or "It might be this, or it might be that". Now the minute anyone mentions a class here, they are joined before they get a chance to change their mind anyway. So yes, it is very open, and they come in and they are made feel welcome. Straight away they get a cup of tea, sit down, and are asked "What would you like to make"? And "This is stuff that we have made", and "This is such a one". So for them, apart from a class, it's something to do as well, rather than sitting at home vegetating. It starts off as a social thing, and end up doing brilliant stuff you know. So one encourages the other (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 2).

The sense of belonging grew as people continued to be involved. If someone was missing for a period of time it was quite common for a class member or the tutor to follow up on the missing person, to ensure they were okay:

People are interested in one another. And, if they don't see you coming they inquire to know why you are not ... Are you all right ... They are so interested like ... Is such a one sick? I haven't seen you in a long time ... and go up now and see if she is alright. They are so interested like. The tutor would call, or would ring. We had a lot of good teachers. They have your interest at heart as well (Mature adult learner no. 3).

#### **7.6.1.3.3 Adult learners' process: Shared hopes, shared space**

The school evolved into a multi-service building, offering a multitude of services to the learning community. This involved services successfully sharing very limited space. The potential for misunderstanding between services is enormous, and I suspect, one of the major barriers to wider use of school buildings. The following extract describes how the kitchen is used as an adult learning facility. At the end of the adult class, participants boil kettles for the teachers' tea, and on cookery mornings, leave scones for them for their break. This room is also used for meetings, and for the 'Three O'Clock School'. This member of the ancillary staff believes that the school is:

Used very well by the community ... very well ... And very well looked after as well. I mean the mothers clean up after themselves like. They don't believe in leaving nothing around. They look after their equipment and that, you know their sewing machines, everything is put away, everything is left the way they get it you know (Ancillary staff no. 4).

#### **7.6.1.4 Adult learners: Conclusion , relationships, results and processes making a difference**

In this section I shared the impact of KCP on the lives of adult learners through the exploration of relationships, results and processes. Ultimately, KCP transformed the quality of participants' lives. Women left the confines of the home environment to become active adult learners. Women came to the neutral territory of the school, where they had opportunities for learning and socialising. They built solidarity and resilience and formed networks of friends. This warm living organism overflowed like the heart of a volcano into their lives, homes, and the community of Kileely. The skill, knowledge, and experiences they developed impacted on their lives, and on the lives of their families. Furthermore, social and human capital developed as the community of learners became close knit, and supported each other in times of tragedy and sorrow.

#### **7.6.2 Children: It was a family thing**

I interviewed ten former 'Three O'Clock School' participants individually and four attended for focus group interviews. Three participants were female and seven male. The children in the 'Three O'Clock School' attended on two, three, or four afternoons per week.<sup>3</sup> The 'Three O'Clock School' operated for two hours per day. Most of the children were of school going age, predominantly of primary school age, except the babies and toddlers who were brought along by their mothers. The children attended mainstream school, prior to attending the 'Three O'Clock School'. None of the children were involved in any other type of out-of-school activity. Many of the children came in family groups. An average of two mothers attended each session. In this section, I also make reference to the impact on parents whose children attended the 'Three O'Clock School'. I will now discuss the impact of the 'Three O'Clock School' on the lives of children in terms of relationships, results and process.

##### **7.6.2.1 Children's relationships: The key that opened the door to learning**

Former participants of the 'Three O'Clock School' described their relationships with each other, with their parents, and with tutors in the 'Three O'Clock School'.

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout the twenty year period, the Three o'clock School operated two, three or four days per week depending on resources available. When it operated for four days, two separate groups attended for two days each.

### 7.6.2.1.1 Children's relationships: Children and tutors

The quality of relationships between the tutors and the children in the 'Three O'Clock School' was a key factor in making this initiative successful. The former 'Three O'Clock School' participants described their relationships with the tutors as akin to a child-parent relationship, or as a family style relationship. They said 'ye were like parents to us. It wasn't just like an adult and kid thing, or an educational thing. It was more like a family thing' ('Three O'Clock School' participant no. 8):

Like one big family. That's exactly what it was like. There was no teacher about it. Cos you could chat to them [the tutors] away. Even though we were kids like. And God knows what we were saying at the time. They were always polite and kind to us. You wouldn't enjoy going to the 'Three O'Clock School' if the teachers were really serious. Cos the 3 o'clock is like a full experience after school ('Three O'Clock School' participant no. 4).

In this caring environment, tutors supported children, listened to them, laughed with them, taught them, and had high aspirations for them. The child-tutor relationship was deemed the most important aspect of the 'Three O'Clock School' experience by many of the informants I spoke with. While homework support and nutrition were named as important aspects, the love and care children experienced surmounted all other aspects. The 'Three O'Clock School' focus group aptly described the quality of relationships between children and tutors as, 'the key which opened the door to learning':

Voice 1: That was the key [nature of relationship]  
Voice 2: That opened the door to learning  
Voice 1: Cos even if you had the good dinners. I'm not being smart like Ann. Even though you had the good dinners, and you had the homework, but if there was no communication, or no trust, it would be a waste of time, to be honest with you.

The children attended the 'Three O'Clock School' in a voluntary capacity. Throughout the individual interviews, and in the focus group, the former 'Three O'Clock School' participants discussed both long and short term benefits of involvement. They did so, conscious of the economic and personal circumstances of their childhoods. They strongly acknowledged and appreciated the opportunities which involvement in the 'Three O'Clock School' afforded them, as the excerpt from the 'Three O'Clock School' focus group demonstrates:

Voice 1: [tutor] was like an older brother like. He always played with us  
Voice 2: He didn't box the head off you  
Voice 3: When you got home then, you had no one else to play with. So you can't wait to come back the next day. You'd be waiting and waiting  
Voice 1: Waiting and waiting, just to come back next day, excited  
Voice 2: Trips and all  
Voice 3: Kilkee [sea-side resort]  
Voice 1: I always remember the house, and the boat outside  
Voice 4: People like us back then would never have got away.

Parents of former 'Three O'Clock School' participants were also aware of the limitations of family finances and the joy the initiative brought to the children. One mother recounted the Christmas parties, when Santa brought gifts to all the children. She believed having parties in the 'Three O'Clock School' was wonderful, 'Cos I couldn't afford really to be bringing them, all of them, into Santa Claus. But we went over there, and they got lovely presents. They did now get lovely presents' (Mature adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 3).

Tutors also acknowledged the importance of the relationships between themselves and the children. Tutors described this relationship as caring, supportive, and personal. This is how one tutor described the relationship between tutors and children:

We had the kids, and treated the kids very much as our own kids. That hasn't changed. I will do for the kids what I will do for my own kids. And I would put myself in locus parentis, am, without needing to be told to do so formally. I take it personal (Tutor no. 1).

#### **7.6.2.1.2 Children's relationships: Children and parents**

The parents who were involved in the 'Three O'Clock School' acknowledged the impact it had on their relationships with the children. They said the 'Three O'Clock School' provided them with the opportunity to learn, play, and eat together. It also facilitated them to share experiences which were sometimes new to both parents and children, such as trips and holidays. As one mother said, 'It was great to be with the kids. It was somewhere to go with my kids' (Mature adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 1). Another mother acknowledged the sense of achievement she got from the experience. She felt that, in working with the children, she was contributing to their growth and development, and that made her feel good about herself:



I felt good as a person. Cos I was able to help a younger child, do you know what I mean. Whereas, I wouldn't have gotten the chance, would I now, outside of the home, to do that. To help another child with reading or maths. And I wasn't all that good. But for the younger child, they probably thought I was brilliant (Young adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' no. 2).

Parents felt the 'Three O'Clock School' gave them a warm caring environment in which to work with their children and an opportunity to contribute to the welfare of other children. One young mother described how trust permeated the adult child relationships:

It was mayhem and it was laughter. The positive things that the kids were doing. It was always good, always, always good. We always came away feeling good about something that we did down there. Like even if it was just cooking. Because the kids got involved, do you know what I mean. It was great. The relationship was great. They all seemed to get on. I don't think there was any ... I don't know ... All got on really well. I don't think any of them really felt afraid or anything. Because, well the adults we were all the same. The kids knew us, and I think that has a lot to do with it as well. If they know you, and know what you are about and everything, they will open up to you. I think so, I think that has a lot to do with it (Young adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 2).

#### **7.6.2.1.3 Children's relationships: Relationships between children**

Many of the children attending the 'Three O'Clock School' in the early years of the project were siblings and cousins. The research participants believed that the time they spent in the 'Three O'Clock School' together strengthened their family bonds, helped them to get along together, built resilience, and provided them with common experiences. As one young former participant put it:

I think all the manners that [tutor] and [tutor] taught us, made us kinda have a better relationship with our family members as well. Because sometimes you get a brother and sisters who would drive you up the wall. But in the presence of two polite teachers, who were just always polite to one another ... and I think that helped as well ('Three O'Clock School' participant no. 4).

The former 'Three O'Clock School' described the bond they felt in the group, the closeness they felt to tutors, and to volunteer parents. This culminated in a sense of security, and the creation of a sanctuary, or safe haven, where children could 'be themselves'. In other words children were building resilience:

It was a family like atmosphere. Everyone knew everyone. You could feel very comfortable. And I always classed it as a safe place. That hour that you went in there, or even more even. If something was worrying you, or things weren't as well at home, that you always felt yourself, and safe. It's very hard to explain, it's kind of a bond ('Three O'Clock School' participant no. 9).

#### 7.6.2.1.4 Relationships: Tutors and parents of children in the ‘Three O’Clock School’

The nature of relationships between the tutors and parents of the ‘Three O’Clock School’ children echoed relationships in other aspects of KCP. The parents highly praised the tutors who worked with their children. They strongly acknowledged the quality of the learning environment, the way in which tutors ‘got inside the children’s minds’, encouraging them to behave well. They acknowledged the excitement the children felt, and were very pleased that their children were so happy, and so positively engaged:

[Tutor] was very good with the kids. [Tutor] was a terror. Well when [child] was down there, he was a handful. [child] was a handful. Whereas [tutor] got them all grand, you know. Everything was going great [Tutor] turned them all around. They loved it. They looked forward to it. They were no sooner in from school, “When are we going down to the 3 o'clock?” As I said, they take them on tours. They do games. They help them even in their work [homework] (Mature adult learner and ‘Three O’Clock School’ mother no. 1).

Another mother, not a volunteer in the ‘Three O’Clock School’, really appreciated the way in which the tutors interacted with her children. She believed the tutors made concerted efforts to work with the children, and did not cast aside children who had difficulties. She believed that tutors were able to communicate effectively, and bring about positive changes. She acknowledged the treats, the trips, and the learning support the children received. She saw the ‘Three O’Clock School’ programme as an holistic package, aimed at nurturing the development of the total child. This mother deeply valued the work the tutors did with her children, and the manner in which they communicated with her, and supported her in relation her children:

It’s a great experience for the kids. They take them away and everything. And they cook them something to eat. But they [children] think more of getting something to eat up there [‘Three O’Clock School’], than they do at home, do you know what I meant. It’s more excitement up there. And even for the times, say at Easter they goes away and they buys them an Easter egg. And at Halloween, they goes away and gives them parties. It’s only small little things, but they are very good. Whatever they have on them at all up there, do you know the way, they kind of works with them. They really gets into the kids minds up there, which is great. You can go up and sit down and talk to them. I mean that’s great like. They never turn you away from their door. All you have to do is knock Ann. They talk to you (Young adult learner and ‘Three O’Clock School’ mother no. 1).

Parents of ‘Three O’Clock School’ children, whether directly or indirectly involved, felt they had very honest, productive relationships with the tutors, who treated them with respect. As one parent succinctly put it, ‘they [tutors] have great manners and

everything. They [tutors] are not a bit abrupt or anything Ann' (Young adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 1).

### **7.6.2.2 Children results: No one judged you, it changed my life**

Children love the 'Three O'Clock School'. They all want to know how to get their name down for it ... "My mammy says put my name down for the 'Three O'Clock School'". They absolutely love it. And it has done wonders for the children whose confidence and self-esteem has been at an all time low. They have done so much for those children (Teacher no. 4).

The 'results' of being involved in the 'Three O'Clock School' are numerous. The research participants<sup>4</sup> listed the results in terms of children's academic improvements, development of self-esteem and confidence, resilience building and positive relationships.

#### **7.6.2.2.1 Children results: Children have different needs**

Participants acknowledged the nutritional, emotional, psychological, and academic support children received in the 'Three O'Clock School'. Of course, these children emerged from individual family circumstances, and had diverse needs. Some former participants acknowledged the academic support, and the sense of belonging and fun, as the main impact of the 'Three O'Clock School' on their lives. However, a number of former participants also strongly acknowledged the 'sanctuary' which the 'Three O'Clock School' represented in their lives. For some children mainstream school was not a happy place. Some were conscious of their personal circumstances, and said they felt different and judged within the mainstream school environment:

I remember me as young. We wouldn't have so much and you were inclined to get bullied at school for it, and you know ... Whereas you might not have the best skirt on or the best pair of shoes on. Whereas you are targeted for it. But when you came to 3 o'clock, no one judged anyone. You know that's the kind of a feeling, and I always said it. It changed my life ('Three O'Clock School' participant no. 9).

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<sup>4</sup> I asked former 3 o'clock school participants, teachers, tutors, and parents to identify the impact on the children of being involved in the 3 o'clock school.

#### **7.6.2.2.2 Children results: Improved school attendance**

The former ‘Three O’Clock School’ attendees said that going to the ‘Three O’Clock School’ motivated them to attend mainstream school. The tutors in the ‘Three O’Clock School’ strongly encouraged children to attend mainstream school prior to attending the ‘Three O’Clock School’:

To be honest, that’s why you got up for school in the mornings. It’s because you knew you had 3 o’clock afterwards. Because they [tutors] liked to know you went to school in 3 o’clock you know. Me personally, I hated school. And my sense of release was down in the 3 o’clock. That was school for me. I enjoyed it. My friends were there. I never felt that atmosphere in school. It just gives you the will to get out of bed in the morning, when you knew you were coming here (to the 3 o’clock) ... Cos as a child you’d be saying to yourself, as a child you know, “I wonder what we are cooking today, I wonder who is going to be there, what are we painting”? You know little things like that, how they can make a big impact on your life. It’s completely different. You don’t realise it until you get older. It was the happiest of my whole childhood, was the 3 o’clock. The sense of belonging ... (‘Three O’Clock School’ participant no. 9).

#### **7.6.2.2.3 Children results: Achievement and behaviour**

A teacher who worked in the host school during the initial stage believed that the ‘Three O’Clock School’ school had a positive impact on children in terms of behaviour, learning motivation, and capacity to interact with their peers and teachers:

They [children] displayed more interest in work and on the whole were more willing pupils than they might have been otherwise. In many cases their behaviour in class, previously disruptive, became amiable and cooperative with both teachers and other pupils. In my classroom, I saw much improvement in general attitude, towards myself and the school at large (Teacher no. 5).

The playroom, room 3 was also a great motivator during the ‘Three O’Clock School’ sessions. Children went to the playroom at the end of the ‘Three O’Clock School’, and had fun working with educational materials, and playing in the castle. It emerged during my research that there was an additional motivational aspect to the playroom. Children said that they loved it so much, “It kept them going to school every day”. They also said that they ‘behaved their best cos they loved it so much’. This playroom provided warm happy memories.

#### **7.6.2.2.4 Children results: Academic achievement builds confidence in school**

The former ‘Three O’Clock School’ participants were very appreciative of the academic support they received. This support was in the form of homework support, and supplementary activities, which supported academic development. They claimed

that this support had an impact on the quality of their school lives, in that they went into school with homework done, and with increased confidence in their ability:

It had an effect on education. Cos we started to like it [school work] then. Cos you don't like it when you don't know how to do it. But, when you know how to do it, it becomes fun ('Three O'Clock School' focus group participant no. 4).

Former participants constantly recalled the fun element in the 'Three O'Clock School', but did not want to give the impression that the impact related only to short term fun. One former participant, now an accomplished young adult, was very grateful for the academic support the 'Three O'Clock School' offered:

We had fun like. But you have to say, that we did get something out of it as well like. It wasn't just like fun. We got ... our education was helped out of it like. Ye helped us with a lot, you know what I mean. Just like we were kids, and I know we were going to school and everything. But if there was anything at all we were stuck at ... Even when I was in Secondary school, I remember if there was anything I was stuck on, I might ask mam, and she'd find out, coming up do you know [tutor] or anyone like that, she would ask em ('Three O'Clock School' participant no. 8).

#### **7.6.2.2.5 Children results: A sense of belonging**

The participants contrasted the intimate, close-knit atmosphere of the 'Three O'Clock School' with the large classes they attended in mainstream school. The participants said that the intimate interactive environment of the 'Three O'Clock School' was conducive to supporting and motivating them to learn. According to some participants this individual support was sometimes not as available in school, or in the home:

The most important thing was, you could get the help with the work [homework]. Cos in school those days you were frightened to ask your teacher. You are talking about a class of maybe twenty to thirty kids. By all means, that teacher couldn't help you, even if she wanted to, because there was too many in the class. In school, you were kind of at the back of the class. Whereas in here, if there was any problems you could ask for it [help]. Cos of course my mother wasn't very ... did not have much literacy skills. If you had any problems here, say with your English or Maths, you knew you could get it [help]. And it was explained in a way that you understood. And that sense of enjoyment as well. But it was a learning process, and that's what I wanted. I wanted to learn ('Three O'Clock School' participant no. 9).

The intimate friendly atmosphere of the 'Three O'Clock School' enabled communication and a high degree of personal attention. Also the different age levels attending meant that older children helped younger children. This issue arose in the 'Three O'Clock School' focus group discussion:

Voice 1: We were all in the same room. We were all listening to everything everyone was saying, learning off them. What you don't know, you learn off them, and they learn off you. If they don't know anything, and you know it, you tell them. And if you don't know anything, they'll tell you

Voice 2: Everyone helped each other didn't they?

Researcher: Do you think ye helped each other?

Voice 2: Some people set up a 3 o'clock [an after school programme] as helping people with their homework. It went way beyond that. Maybe that was the aims of it at the time, but honestly it went way deeper than that, because it ended up a lot more.

#### **7.6.2.2.6 Children's results: Personal skills, confidence and self-esteem**

According to the former 'Three O'Clock School' participants, and indeed their parents, tutors, and teachers, the 'Three O'Clock School' built children's confidence and self esteem. These skills were developed through positive interaction with adults and children. The tutors and parents acted as role models, a factor which the former 'Three O'Clock School' participants averted to regularly in their interviews. The tutors themselves were aware that they were in a unique position to foster and develop social and life skills through active role modelling. There have always been both male and female tutors in the 'Three O'Clock School' and this offered specific opportunities for role modelling effective communication and collaboration:

You have to motivate, and you have to provide yourself as a role model. When [tutor]and myself worked together, am, I baked [tutor] read, [tutor] baked I read, we baked. And how we didn't kill them all with our baking. It was commented on a few times over the years by the youngsters that, why I was doing the washing up? I think that feeds back long term into respect, not for me but for each other. Respect. You cannot have this clear cut division of labour, saying "That's the women's work". That attitude is gone. It's not a successful attitude in life. That's challenged. Those ideas are challenged. The idea of non confrontational working of man and woman together. That if one of us said 1,2,or 3, the other would say, "That's ok we will try that". That's not to say we couldn't disagree. But we showed the kids that, watch these two working together, how come they are not fighting, arguing, not getting cross and having a nice time. What can we learn from this? Don't fight, don't get cross, and you can have a nice time. That in itself is a recipe for life long enjoyment.

#### **7.6.2.2.7 Children's results: Respectful behaviour**

The former 'Three O'Clock School' participants believed that the respectful interaction of tutors with each other, and with children, set expectations for how they should treat each other. This way of behaving impacted on the ambiance and atmosphere in the 'Three O'Clock School'. It developed life skills which impacted on their later lives. According to the members of the 'Three O'Clock School' focus group, it developed competencies, and a sense of personal responsibility as well as a sense of efficacy:

Voice 1: You learned right from wrong

Voice 2: You learned self confidence, that there is more to life, and that you could be whatever you put your mind to. I always remember that Ann, “You can do this [child], and you can be whatever you set your mind to”. And you always gave good vibes out. Never negative ones. That was very important as well. Because you walked away from here really feeling that you could change the world in so many different ways. Cos if ye believed in us, we believed in ourselves then, didn't we.

The ‘Three O’Clock School’ aimed to develop the child in all his/her facets, including educational, emotional, social and psychological. One of the tutors I interviewed, saw a strong connection between the development of social skills and educational attainment. His/her belief was that:

[Children’s] formal educational needs would be enhanced by improving their social skills, and their understanding of what is required to be successful in this race [educational attainment] (Tutor no. 1).

Many of the young people believed that their experiences in the ‘Three O’Clock School’ built personal competencies. These skills enabled them to build relationships with peers and elders:

It gives you confidence. Cos you are dealing with a lot of other people. You are not going home and just going out on the streets playing like. You were dealing with other people, and learning to deal with other people. You know, how to interact with other people. I think it would have actually would have built confidence and social skills (‘Three O’Clock School’ participant no. 8).

I made a lot of friends, a lot of them, they are still around to this day (‘Three O’Clock School’ participant no. 5).

Former ‘Three O’Clock School’ participants spoke of the long term impact of KCP on their lives. Some of the former participants are now parents themselves, or uncles or aunts. They said that the experiences they had and the skills they developed impacted on how they interacted with their own children, or nieces or nephews:

It makes you more of a role model with your own family. Me personally ... I think that I’m more open minded, I’ve learned the skills to be a good listener. Cos, that’s very important. Just basically, to be like a good parent. And to know a child can come, no matter what it is, that they would be able to speak to you about it (‘Three O’Clock School’ participant no. 9).

#### **7.6.2.2.8 Children’s results: Life choices and attitudes**

The experience also impacted on life choices, as a number of former ‘Three O’Clock School’ participants went on to work in different capacities with learners of different ages. They spoke of their happy memories, and wanted to provide children with

happy memories since, ‘memories make you who you are’. In the following dialogue from the ‘Three O’Clock School’ focus group, former participants discuss their desire to make children ‘feel the same way’ as they did, when they were in the ‘Three O’Clock School’:

Voice 1: I want to do the same kind of work as what...

Voice 2: Make them [children] feel the same way you did like [in the ‘Three O’Clock School’]

Voice 3: That’s why I love playing with kids as well, messing with kids, and slugging em, not slugging em like, playing with em

Voice 1: Especially the kids that have similar backgrounds to your own cos you feel you have been there, done that. You know what way they feel. You know what things they face ahead of em. And sometimes you go down to their level. Because you, you know over being through it yourself. Because unfortunately they were poor days, and some families have not even changed today. They are still poor. You don't judge them Ann. You don't judge them on their background

Voice 2: Think you are better than them like

Voice 3: Cos you were the same when you were younger as well like

#### **7.6.2.2.9 Children’s results: Enabling children to make positive choices**

Research participants also acknowledged that the ‘Three O’Clock School’ had a preventative impact on their lives. They spoke of the opportunities for crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour which are present in all communities. They were conscious that some young people from their community had been murdered. This caused them to reflect on their own lives, and make conscious decisions about the direction of their lives. This reflective process was enabled by the confidence, resilience and skills they gained in the ‘Three O’Clock School’:

Some friends I know have been shot dead, just gone. Stuff like that makes you think a lot you know, yeah. Like it’s the same with school. If you get grouped with the wrong people then you are just going to go down the wrong road. The road of crime and violence

Researcher: Are you saying being in the ‘Three O’Clock School’ might help kids not to go down that road?

It could, that’s for sure like, definitely. Like they are kids, and could get up to anything. It’s the same anywhere like you know (‘Three O’Clock School’ participant no. 4).

#### **7.6.2.2.10 Children’s results: Children felt special**

In this intimate learning environment young people formed friendships which have lasted through the years. Many of them spoke of the long term impact in terms of the friendships they formed, and the networks they built up, and the skills and resilience they developed. The value of this is not to be underestimated in an environment in



which young people can sometimes feel isolated, and have opportunities to become involved in anti social behaviour.

Throughout the research process former ‘Three O’Clock School’ participants returned again and again to the quality of relationships and the quality of care; the ethos embedded in the ‘Three O’Clock School’. They said their confidence grew as the tutors cared and invested time and energy in them and encouraged them to believe in themselves and have high aspirations. They also returned to the theme of ‘not being judged’, ‘not being different’, but simply being loved and accepted for what they were, children:

A lot of times ye believed in us. And ye always told us that we could make something of ourselves. And whatever you want in life that if you want it that bad you can get it. It was in a way that you gave us that self confidence, and a boost. It always stayed at the back of our minds. That we were special. (‘Three O’Clock School’ participant no. 9).

#### **7.6.2.2.11 Children’s results: The teachers’ view**

The teacher’s focus group also acknowledged the diverse benefits of the ‘Three O’Clock School’, including, the academic, social and personal. Teachers acknowledged the rich learning environment of the ‘Three O’Clock School’, and the positive role models provided by the tutors. They also acknowledged the parents’ appreciation of this service for children. When asked about the benefits of the ‘Three O’Clock School’ the teacher focus group listed the following:

Voice 1: It was good for socialising children who were never out of the community. To take them out, to show them different ... broadening again their horizons. And how to behave, and you know in different situations. And have fun as well. And see good role male mode in [tutor]

Voice 2: Development of self-esteem. I suppose being in the smaller group, and getting that more personal attention as well, has been very good for the self-esteem of a lot of those kids

Voice 3: The families who have come through it ... They see it as a positive support in that their child is ... am ... looked after for an extra period of time, and fed. And knowing that he is in a safe place ... And learning. Especially with big families and a single mother. Just thinking of one particular family. You have been lucky in the sense of the continuity that’s there [tutors and committee members]. I see other projects and if the continuity isn’t there, it wobbles. It falls apart. There has been great continuity with the ‘Three O’Clock School’.

### **7.6.2.3 Children's process: A fun education, you could be a child**

The children in the 'Three O'Clock School' were encouraged to be involved in decision making in relation to all aspects of the 'Three O'Clock School' programme. This involved sitting around the kitchen table, reviewing the activities they had been involved in and planning future activities.

#### **7.6.2.3.1 Children's process: Ways of behaving**

Adults and children were expected to behave respectfully towards each other, to value whatever skills they brought, and to contribute to the learning environment. In the following dialogue from the 'Three O'Clock School' focus group, former participants identify the factors which contribute to a positive learning environment. These ingredients include fun, respect, clear communication, and effective pedagogy:

Voice 1: A good education, teachers telling you what to do  
Voice 2: And you know what you are doing like  
Voice 1: Teachers helping you, your friends helping you  
Voice 2: Like if you have 10 apples in this hand...  
Voice 3: A fun education  
Researcher: What's a fun education?  
Voice 3: Teachers breaking it down for you in your own language  
Voice 1: Making it easier for you  
Voice 2: Fun education is half days. If you are good at break, go down to the castle [playroom]. If bold, stand in the corner  
Voice 4: No big words you can't understand. To be rewarded. To be told you are good at something  
Voice 2: I used never mess to go down to the slide like [go to the playroom]  
Voice 4: And you are all equal. All treated the same. And looked upon as the same. And everyone is given the same treatment  
Voice 1: And there is no difference between anyone  
Voice 3: If you had money, you had money. If you didn't, you didn't, and no  
Voice 1: No one talked about it like  
Voice 4: You shouldn't be outcasted in a class for not having anything  
Voice 2: That's not what you are there for like  
Voice 1 and 2: You are there to learn  
Voice 2: Not to talk about people, to go down to the slide [playroom].

The 'Three O'Clock School' had ground rules. These rules were negotiated with the group, and adherence to the rules was expected with predictable rewards and consequences. This contributed to creating a safe environment for the children. It was a predictable, friendly place, where opinions were taken into account, and rules were understood:

I think everyone that was in there you know ... I'm not saying that we didn't have our little bickering, we did. But we resolved em, and we got on with it. And we were a big family. It could be a bad day for someone, and you could have done something wrong. And you know, and you could have been bold. And you know the other kids would be standing around. And you could snap at someone for example, every day life. But you were told that it was wrong. And you know ... Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that it was all ... But when you were wrong, you were told you were wrong. And you faced up to what you had done. And it made you realise it wouldn't be allowed. And if you wanted to stay you in 3 o'clock, and be a part of that, you had to respect its rules as well. That comes with the territory as well ('Three O'Clock School' participant no. 9).

#### **7.6.2.3.2 Children's process: A place of safety**

When asked to describe how they felt in the 'Three O'Clock School', former participants frequently used the word 'safe'. Safety meant different things to different children. For some it was physical safety, as one former participant said, 'I felt safe down there, safe like, so I didn't get into trouble around the roads, and all that fighting, and all that' ('Three O'Clock School' participant no. 6). For others safety meant feeling a sense of emotional and psychological security; the space to be free from troubles and worries. In the words of another former participant, 'It was nice. It was secure, do you know what I mean. We were never like ... No worries or anything, while we were there. We had ye' ('Three O'Clock School' participant no. 8). The issue of safety was raised consistently throughout the research. The creation of a safe, nurturing, physical and emotional environment, was a major accomplishment for the 'Three O'Clock School', as the following quote from a parent of children who attended the 'Three O'Clock School' indicates:

You knew your children were safe when they were in there [in the 'Three O'Clock School']. You knew they were going to get the help that they needed. But most of all, you knew it was a safe place, and everyone in there would look after them, and mind them, they were part of a unit kind of (Young adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 3).

#### **7.6.2.3.3 Children's process: Communicating openly and respectfully**

This safe environment was created through having a shared understanding of behaviour expectations, with predictable consequences and rewards. The nature of relationships between tutors, parents, and children also contributed to the creation of a safe and predictable environment. According to the research participants they felt they could approach either tutor, male or female, on any issue. They believed tutors would listen to them and help them to 'sort out' any issues they needed help with:

You had a male figure and you had a female figure. But you could always go to both. But it was just you felt safe, Ann. And I know we have mentioned that word a few times. But that was the key of it. Because there was no tension ('Three O'Clock School' focus group, 'Three O'Clock School' participant no. 8).

In the following extract, the interaction of tutors and children is aptly described by one former 'Three O'Clock School' participant. This young person believed the tutors in the 'Three O'Clock School' 'brought out the best' in the children and perhaps the children 'brought out the best' in the tutors:

With the tutors there was always an understanding. There ... That's very important, and communication. It was very important that they would be able to talk to you. And you would be able to talk to them. And if there is no communication, there is nothing you know. I think ye [tutors] were happy, and we were happy. Cos ye brought out the best in us, and maybe we brought out the best in ye  
Researcher: Ye definitely brought out the best in me  
( 'Three O'Clock School' participant no. 8).

This is how the 'Three O'Clock School' focus group described the process of interaction between tutors and children. They felt free to ask questions, assured of an answer, and free to act as children:

Voice 1: It was happy. You want to feel like this at home. You had people to talk to, and people to play with. And if you needed to ask for something, you asked  
And they would answer you, make you understand  
Voice 2: They wouldn't ignore you  
Voice 1: Not saying you would get ignored at home now, but you would feel more like talking  
Voice 3: You felt you could leave your guards down, and you could be yourself.  
And I think that is very important. You could be a child  
Researcher: You could be a child?  
Voice 3: Cos that's all we were Ann, was children. Some of us was made grow up very fast. You know a place that you felt you could be yourself  
Voice 1: Other people liked you, like  
Voice 3: You weren't judged or nothing sure you weren't.

#### **7.6.2.4 Children: Conclusion, relationships, results and processes making a difference**

In this section I profiled the impact of the 'Three O'Clock School' on the life of former participants in terms of relationships, results, and process. Children came to the 'Three O'Clock School' and engaged in a variety of learning activities designed to build personal skills, resilience, academic skills, and interpersonal skills. These former participants identified short term and long term results from their involvement with this initiative. They believed it nurtured their development, socially, emotionally and academically. They valued the positive caring relationships, the secure

environment, and the emphasis on creating a safe and fun place to learn, and where they could enjoy being a child. Children built resilience.

Indeed the 'Three O'Clock School' met children's needs at different levels, resonating closely with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The 'Three O'Clock School' programme addressed the most basic nutritional needs, and also provided a safe, nurturing environment where children built self esteem and a sense of belonging. According to one participant, 'what made the 3 o'clock so magic and to work for all of us those years is that everybody helped and felt safe with each other. And that's very hard to come by'.

### **7.6.3 SPACE participants**

I interviewed six former SPACE participants individually, four of whom attended subsequently for the focus group interview. The young women involved in the SPACE project were young mothers, all of whom were living in their family homes.<sup>5</sup> The SPACE project facilitator was a member of KCP committee. She was passionate in her desire to open up opportunities for young women who were mothers. There was a vacant room in the school, room 4, which we designated for use by the SPACE project. While all the young women acknowledged the support they got from their families, they also gave in-depth personal descriptions of the challenges and responsibilities they faced as young mothers. SPACE provided them with a forum to share their experiences, hopes, aspirations, and frustrations with life. It provided a confidential context in which young women made friends, developed self-confidence, built resilience and focused on their own needs and aspirations:

It was good to get me out of myself. Cos you do tend I think with me, tend to be surrounded with your own family. And tend to want to stay there. Cos its safe, do you know that kind of a way. That [SPACE] started me off, bringing me out, doing other things. I found, for me anyway, it was great. I did anyway. I found it was brilliant (SPACE participant no. 4).

The lives of these young women had changed enormously when they became mothers. Some of them spoke of the isolation they felt from their peers. Some spoke of losing friends, as their lifestyles became restricted after their babies were born. In

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<sup>5</sup> When the SPACE project was established all young women were living in their family homes. One young woman moved from the family home during the lifespan of the SPACE project.

the following extract, a young mother describes the life change brought about by motherhood, the isolation she felt, and the sanctuary she found in the SPACE project:

They [other members of the SPACE project] held out their hands to me and they were the close friends. You'd be surprised what friends you lose when you do become a teenage mam. Its only now I realise it like, you know. Others going to discos, they had their boy-friends. And there was only so long I could stay out for, cos you couldn't keep a baby out late Ann. And then you'd have to be rushing. Because you couldn't sit out on wall and be bottle feeding. Cos your child would be spewing, or you know things like that. Or when you went to town, you couldn't stay in town as long as you could before you had the baby. Cos you would be starting the feeds again, and the nappy changing. And you know they [former friends] didn't want that. They had their own things. I lost an awful lot of friends, and I mean they were close friends. And they were grand while I was pregnant. Cos I could still go out. But when the baby came, grand, they came to see me in the hospital. But within a week or two they drifted on, and I was left there (SPACE participant no. 5).

Some young women felt embarrassed at having become pregnant, and found it difficult to mix in the community, in the words of one young mother SPACE gave her confidence:

It gave me confidence Ann. It gave me confidence. It made me realise I was not the only one. I was so embarrassed. It made me realise I didn't have to be. Life wasn't over cos I had a child, you know what I mean (SPACE participant no. 2).

This is echoed by another young mother, whose confidence had plummeted to an all time low. She felt intimidated, and found it difficult to relate to people outside of her immediate family:

[SPACE] gave more confidence. As far as like, I mean, well with me myself personally, when you get pregnant at such a young age and you are kind of on your own. Your confidence kinda goes. You get very intimidated by other people (SPACE participant no. 4).

This feeling of isolation and intimidation can surface even within supportive families. The interviewees acknowledged the support of their families, but even within supportive families, the participants needed the SPACE to explore their own feelings and needs:

It is so hard when you are in that situation. You feel so alone. You feel so isolated. I did back then, that was 14 years ago ... Its very isolating. I felt everyone was talking about me. My life was over. My mother was great. My mother is still great. My father is great. I have great parents. Not everybody has that Ann (SPACE participant no. 2).

Not all young women felt embarrassed at becoming young mothers. Some were less affected by what other people thought. However, these young women still acknowledged the personal impact of SPACE on their lives, the breakdown of isolation, and the building of solidarity within the group. This following extract is from an interview with a young woman:

[SPACE] made me come out of myself a bit. I realised I wasn't the only lone parent in the area. Not that that bothered me ever, nor bother me what people thought. I couldn't care less. If they have a problem, it's their problem. It was great to meet other girls. Basically that was it, get away from the house, and have a nice chat, and a cup of tea (SPACE participant no. 1).

These young women focused their energies on their babies. They were responsible for the health and welfare of these young lives, a responsibility they took very seriously. Prior to involvement with the SPACE project they acknowledged that a lot of the focus was on the baby's needs, and very little focus was on their own needs as young mothers and as young women. SPACE gave them the opportunity to focus on their own as well as on their baby's needs. In the following extract a young mother shares the impact of having the opportunity to focus on her own needs:

[SPACE] was great to have something for yourself. A lot of your energies goes into the baby, and everyone you kinda talk to is "How's the baby doing"? and "What are you doing with the baby this week"? or "Are you bringing the baby to the health nurse to get weighed"? And you are kindof bringing the babies to all these nurses to get weighed, and get checked, and everybody seems to have a say. And nobody seems to say, "How are you doing"? Do you know that kind of a way (SPACE participant no. 4).

These young women had very little money, only the lone parent's allowance of £74 per week. None of them were working outside the home when they joined the SPACE project. One of the young women moved into her own accommodation a year into the project. In time FÁS CE Schemes came on line in communities. These schemes allowed young mothers retain their social welfare payments in addition to their FÁS CE wages. In later years, two of the former SPACE participants worked on the FÁS CE scheme located in the school. These jobs were highly sought after, as in addition to improving the financial circumstances of the participants, they also offered training opportunities:

[SPACE participant] had to pay out rent. There was ESB (electricity costs) and by the time you did a bit of shopping, there was hardly anything left out of the 74 pounds. So people were crying out to get jobs on schemes. The schemes [FÁS Community Employment schemes] started to come along. They thought they were the best things ever, cos you could keep your book [social welfare allowance]. And you got paid on the scheme. And they pay you for to get babysitters (SPACE participant no. 5).

In the preceding paragraphs I have endeavoured to set the context in which the SPACE project evolved. In Chapter Six ‘Journey of Hope: Transference, Transition and Transformation’, I locate the SPACE project within the broader Kileely Community Project. I will now explore the impact of the SPACE project in terms of relationships, results and process.

### **7.6.3.1 SPACE relationships: No rivalry, no jealousy**

The nature of relationships between the young women involved in the SPACE project and their relationship with the facilitator was key to the success of this initiative. This group of vulnerable young women along with their able facilitator built each other’s confidence and emerged more resilient and able to claim their places in the world.

#### **7.6.3.1.1 SPACE relationships: Moving on with confidence**

Two of the SPACE participants were cousins. Other than that, the young women were not friends prior to participating in the SPACE project. Most of the participants had mothers involved in the adult education classes of KCP. Three of their mothers were part of the KCP committee. Each of the young women described their reticence to become involved in the SPACE project, and the encouragement they got from home to get involved. They found it difficult, as they had no prior experience of being part of a group. Also they were vulnerable at that time, and slow to move out from home into the world. However, the research indicates that within a short time their confidence had grown, they enjoyed the Wednesday morning sessions, and they had bonded with their peers, and with the facilitator. The facilitator, an adult learner and member of the KCP committee, supported the young women to identify their needs, nurtured their confidence, built their resilience. She worked very hard to bring learning or employment opportunities to these young women.



### 7.6.3.1.2 SPACE relationships: Relationships between SPACE participants

A deep bond grew between the young women themselves. They met on Wednesday mornings, in their own room in the school, and in an atmosphere of caring, sharing, and confidentiality. They discussed their situations, identified their needs, and began to realise they were entitled to have dreams for themselves, and their children. They supported each other, listened to each other, and were delighted with any achievements within the group. In the following extract one of the participants captures the ethos and solidarity which prevailed in the group:

It was great. There was no rivalry, no jealousy, you know. Say if one girl said, say I bought him a pair of shoes and they were 20 pounds at the time, no one no one would get jealous. They would say "Good on you", that, "You saved up the money". Cos money was tight at the time you know. You only got a certain amount on your book [social welfare payment]. And if you had a place of your own it was very hard to even pay out £20 for a pair of shoes for the child, and no one would begrudge em. That we were all friendly and we wouldn't be backstabbers, you know we wouldn't ... I wouldn't go along and read one girl, cos she got the shoes, and she wouldn't read me, cos I hadn't the money you know. We all supported each other now (SPACE participant no. 4).

SPACE provided young women with the opportunity to share their opinions, and offer support to each other, as one former participant said, 'we shared views with one another, and if any of us had problems, we spoke about them, and everyone tried to help ... We got on grand' (SPACE participant no. 2). The young women felt isolated from their peers, and this group provided an opportunity to be with other young women, and interact not only as young mothers, but also as young women. They shared a common experience, which formed the foundation for the development of friendships and solidarity. As one young woman said, 'Once I came here, I made new friends. Cos they knew what it was like too. Cos they were on their own' (SPACE participant no. 5):

Do you know when the other parents are your own age, you are able to understand them more. And mainly all in the same boat as one another ... Most of us were unmarried mothers at the time, all around the one age (SPACE participant no. 3).

Another young woman described SPACE as a safe place in which she could express her emotions. In SPACE, she was free to cry, in a context in which she would get support:

It was brilliant. We done so much there. And we would go over there Ann, if one of us was having a bad day, or a bad week, we could talk. We all got our turn. Our space to talk, you know what I mean. If I wanted to have a good cry, what I wouldn't do at home, upsetting the mother and father, I could do it over there with the girls. If I had something I wanted to know about, the girls would tell me like. We could laugh and cry together. It was absolutely brilliant now (SPACE participant no. 2).

Many of the young women felt their 'lives were over', when they became mothers. They saw a lifetime of childrearing ahead, with little personal freedom. Some of them had been in Secondary school when they became pregnant, and had subsequently dropped out of school.<sup>6</sup> The SPACE project afforded them the opportunity to discuss their aspirations and to dream, to envisage further learning, and work opportunities:

What I wanted to do all my life was to work with people or animals. That was my life-long dream. And I'd be saying "I can't, I've left school, I have a child". And they [the other SPACE participants] would be saying, "Of course you can, of course you can, why can't you"? They gave me the confidence, do you know what I mean. Definitely I'll never regret the day coming over (SPACE participant no. 2).

#### **7.6.3.1.3 SPACE relationships: Relationships between SPACE participants and their facilitator**

There was a strong, respectful, and caring relationship between the facilitator and the SPACE participants. They simply loved her, and she loved them. She saw them as young talented women who had babies. She was disturbed that their educational opportunities ceased when they became pregnant, and believed they deserved the chance to become independent, and fulfill their potential, in spite of the fact that they had become young mothers:

They all seemed to drop out [of school]. And I couldn't understand how their lives should be over and they wouldn't get a chance to fulfill their lives. And have as much a chance of going out to work and earn a living. And have their own dignity. Just because they had a baby. They didn't murder anyone. They didn't commit any robberies. They just had a baby. (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 1).

She was infuriated by how these young women were treated, seen as parasites, who had babies just to get a 'big allowance' and 'a house'. The following extract from the SPACE focus group affords an insight into the close relationship between the facilitator and the 'girls':

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<sup>6</sup> Some schools had asked the girls to leave on becoming pregnant, believing they would be bad examples to other young girls, if allowed to stay and complete their education.

Voice 1: She [the facilitator] was more of a friend kind of

Voice 2: A friend

Voice 3: There was no kinda leader. [facilitator] wasn't the boss. She was one of the girls

Voice 4: I remember the first morning. God help us, the poor women in the sewing class. They had made cushion covers, and a little table cloths. Cos we had nothing. And they were trying to make it comfortable, and mock flowers. But all the seats arranged in front, and a table up there. And I said, "The first thing we are doing is, no one sits like a class room". And we made a circle, cos it was terrible [to have a division]. And they [the young women] might have been shaking. But there was no one shaking more than me Ann. Cos I said, "The cheek of me, thinking I can do something". But I didn't want to do anything. I just wanted to give them a place where they could talk about makeup, and fellas if they wanted to. It didn't matter [what they talked about].

Voice 2: It didn't even dawn on us that you weren't a lone parent. Or that you didn't have a lone parent, you know ... you weren't, you weren't it ... You took an interest in

Voice 4: I saw it in [another estate] as well. Living at home with a baby. The mother was probably nagging. I was probably nagging as well, when it was my turn. And they [young mothers] needed to get out of the house for a couple of hours. Where do you go with a baby like? It's not like you can go to the pictures, if you are single

Voice 1: You walk the streets

Voice 2: You can't go to your friends house

Voice 4: Cos you are in their way as well, obviously. And I said, "Jesus Christ, there must be something we can do. Give them some few hours where they can go. Where they are in no one's way. Where they are getting out from under their mother's feet.

The young women interacted very well with the facilitator. She gained their trust, confidence, and respect. This is how one of the former participants described her:

I think we felt even though she was an older person, we could confide in her. Definitely you could like. And even when she would pass out [from the adult classes] with the women of her own age, we would always get a big salute off her. And we would always salute her. And do you know, it was great that she was involved with our group, as well as being with her own crowd, She was still with us. And I think she felt close to us as well (SPACE participant no. 4).

The young women knew that she would not break confidences, and consequently they did not have separate conversations which excluded her:

She was always involved in the conversations. There was never anything that was said when she wasn't there, that wasn't said, when she was there. We trusted her (SPACE participant no. 6).

#### **7.6.3.1.4 SPACE relationships: Relationships between SPACE participants and their children**

The SPACE project also impacted on the relationships these young mothers had with their children. Some of the women spoke of the comfort and convenience of having a crèche, where 'their babies were safe' for a couple of hours. It was quite difficult for some of the young mothers to place their children in the crèche, as it was the first

time they were separated from them. Other young women spoke of the joy of doing different activities with the children, and of watching their children interact with the other children. A young mother relayed the joy of spending time with her child in the SPACE project, free from the directions of senior members of her household:

Spending time with your child, when you are at home, you have a routine of what you do everyday. When you came down here, it was your time, together with your child. With no one butting in, saying “We will go here now”, or saying, “I’ll bring him or her here”, or whatever. But you came here, and if you wanted to do something, you could do it. And if you didn’t want to, you didn’t have to. It was your own space and you know (SPACE participant no. 3).

### **7.6.3.2 SPACE results: It was kinda like you were going ‘back to yourself’**

The young women identified an array of results accruing from involvement in the SPACE project, both for themselves and their babies. The young women developed skills, gained confidence, and explored routes for further education as well as employment opportunities. They also believed involvement with the project afforded positive outcomes for their children who were immersed in a rich social learning environment.

#### **7.6.3.2.1 SPACE results: Reclamation of self as learner**

The young women spoke of their lack of confidence and feeling of isolation on becoming young mothers. Being part of SPACE nurtured their confidence and fostered personal skills which empowered them to look at their own lives, and access learning opportunities. These learning opportunities were in the form of courses available in other community learning centres, as well as opportunities to return to formal education to complete state exams. In the following extract a former participant highlights the personal impact of attending a course which was aimed at her own needs as a young woman:

I remember doing a self development course. We went to the [centre in another estate]. The house up there. It was all to do with makeup, and personal hygiene, and all that kind of thing. I think it was called a self development course, myself and [SPACE participant], and (SPACE participant) did that one. So that was brilliant, It was kinda like you were going back to yourself. Kinda doing something for yourself. I enjoyed that actually. Cos I learned how to do makeup, cleansing, and everything. It was great to go into a group where the teacher was actually telling you to do something with yourself, rather than saying “This is how your baby needs to be looked after”. That it was all about looking after yourself , it kind of build confidence (SPACE participant no. 4).

#### **7.6.3.2.2 SPACE results: Confidence and self-esteem**

According to one young woman SPACE gave her the confidence to go back and participate in groups, 'I would never have gone to the self development course up in (another centre). I would never have done that, only we were in the group with the girls, and the girls were going like' (SPACE participant no. 2). The experience of meeting other young women and participating in the group developed communication skills which impacted on the young women's ability to communicate in the broader community:

When I'd go out, I found it very hard to communicate. And a group talking. I found it hard to get involved. I'd get embarrassed. I'd feel my face lighting up. But when I came to the project then, the sessions in the morning, of talking and communication, helped from that point of view (SPACE participant no. 3).

#### **7.6.3.2.3 SPACE results: Extended learning opportunities**

When the young women had identified an area of interest the facilitator invited a variety of people to offer workshops. These workshops included household DIY, social welfare entitlements, personal development, jewellery making, make up, opportunities for return to study, and employment opportunities. They also went swimming for a period of time with their babies.

#### **7.6.3.2.4 SPACE results: Return to education**

A number of the young women decided to return to education, and with the support of crèche facilities, returned to take state exams. Four young women decided to return to study to complete their Leaving Certificate:

There was a girl in anyway<sup>7</sup> and, I said I'd like to go back and do my Leaving Cert. Then [SPACE participant] and [SPACE participant] and [SPACE participant] came too. So we went up, applied, the four of us went together. If I hadn't come here to SPACE I wouldn't even have attempted to go [return to study] (SPACE participant no. 2).

The young women felt room 4 was 'their space' in which they could interact with each other. It was a place where it was safe to be a young woman, and to take the opportunity to explore their own needs independent of their roles as mothers. These young women also used the SPACE group as a forum for sharing information:

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<sup>7</sup> A member of CLVEC visited the group and explained how the VTOS programme worked. It offered adults the opportunity to complete their Leaving Certificate and retain their social welfare benefits.

Being in the room, it was like 'our room' our kinda space. It was great. Cos you were meeting the girls that were in similar situations to you. And we always kind of passed on information. If there was any social welfare entitlements, or lone parent entitlements. So we were able to tell each other things like that as well (SPACE participant no. 4).

#### **7.6.3.2.5 SPACE results: Impact on the children's lives**

The young women believed that involvement with the SPACE project also had a very positive impact on their children's lives. These women were living in their parent's homes, so the babies were often surrounded by adults. The young women believed it was very good for their children to mix with other children:

The crèche was great for him. Cos there was all adults at home. He wouldn't have been around much children until he went into that little crèche. And it was great like. It kinda got him used to kids. It makes them more aware of themselves, and other children, as well. Cos I think they can grow up too quick if they are with adults too much (SPACE participant no. 5).

As with other strands of KCP, the issue of safety was again raised by the young women. They were content that their babies were safe in room 5. They had made arrangements with the crèche workers, that they would call them if the baby became distressed, or they needed them for any reason:

Then there was a crèche there. We could bring our kids. They were only next door to us. And we knew they were well looked after. [crèche worker] was minding them in the crèche. And it was brilliant (SPACE participant no. 2).

#### **7.6.3.3 SPACE process: We just did it**

It was like a big sitting room, living room. You could have tea and biscuits then, any time you wanted really, do you know. Once we closed that door, we knew the kids were looked after. So we could be us. We weren't mummies anymore as such. We could just be us. Just be individuals, rather than, although we were a group of mothers ... am ... We didn't have to be a group of mothers. I know we were there cos we were young mothers, but that wasn't just why we were there in the end do you know (SPACE participant no. 6).

The need for a specific programme to meet the needs of young women, who were also young mothers, was identified by a member of the KCP committee, a local woman who believed that motherhood for young women should not preclude them from accessing opportunities for personal development, and learning. In her own words:

I just saw the waste. I just saw the waste. And I thought, if this is going to go on, someone has to do something. If we could do that for ourselves, [develop KCP], we could do it for them. Some of them were daughters of women in the project [KCP] anyway. If we could have done that for ourselves we could do it for them.

And there was no one judging them. And there wasn't anyone high foluting going around telling them what to do. Or what not to do. I consulted them on everything, and I asked them, and they were always involved (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 1).

This local woman saw the need for young women to have a place to go. To have the space to be young women for a little while. She was also conscious of the social climate in which she was developing this initiative. Lone parenthood was dealt with in a number of ways in previous generations. Firstly, we have a history of incarcerating young women in laundries, and taking their babies from them, or sending them away to England, to have their babies. Few women kept their babies in previous generations, and those who did were often ostracised by society and the church. These young women then, were a new generation of women, who were keeping and raising their babies. According to the participants it was a difficult social climate in which to do so, since they were seen as opportunists who were 'getting money from the state' and 'houses from the local corporation':

It was my dream that schools would take the fact that girls get pregnant on board, and the fact that it doesn't affect the fella's life. Cos he can go through the whole school and college, and whatever and whatever, and no problems at all ... That someone would get it into their heads to work around it. But then again, you'd probably get all the knockers [cynics] I suppose "Oh do that<sup>8</sup> and you are only encouraging them". So that was all the negative things. We never let it get in the way. We never just thought about the whys and the wherefors. We just did it (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 1).

#### **7.6.3.3.1 SPACE process: Recruitment of SPACE participants**

Attracting the young mothers was the next challenge. As previously mentioned, these young women felt isolated from their peers, and needed to be encouraged to come along. The fact that some of their mothers were involved in KCP, that it was a local initiative, and that their mothers encouraged them to come along, all helped to encourage them to attend. The following account from one young woman offers an insight into the circumstances in which the SPACE project evolved:

My mother came over [home] and said they were starting the project in the school. And I always remember, it was Wednesday. Cos I lived for Wednesdays and I ... "No way" [I'm not going]. I had no interest. "I'm not making a fool of myself". I went anyway. My mother said "Go on, go over and (facilitator) was facilitator there. And it was brilliant. The first day I went in there was girls all in the same situation as myself. All in the same boat. All around the same age. All had kids. All young mothers (SPACE participant no. 2).

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<sup>8</sup> Meaning support the young mothers by providing an allowance and accommodation.

According to another participant, ‘the first couple of days were the toughest. Then you kinda get to know everybody’ (SPACE participant no. 3).

#### **7.6.3.3.2 SPACE process: Identifying needs in the early days**

The young women gathered in their room and began to explore their needs. This was new territory for them, and also for the facilitator. During the research process I interviewed the young women and the facilitator individually. I subsequently held a focus group of all the women with their former facilitator. When I asked participants to attend for a focus group, their response was very positive. The following response highlights the esteem in which they held the facilitator:

Make sure [facilitator] is there. I love [facilitator]. She is a dote. She is such a caring person. She took us under her wing. We could have been her daughters. We felt at home there. I did personally, felt at home. Took us under her wing. And every week we all got a chance. It wasn't just all about one person. If we wanted to speak we could. If we didn't want to, we didn't have to. It was so comfortable there. We got our words in anyway. She always knew if there was something bothering us. She was brilliant (SPACE participant no. 2).

#### **7.6.3.3.3 SPACE process: Embracing dialogue as a mechanism for engagement**

This process of listening to each other in a non-judgemental, caring atmosphere fostered personal growth for the group, and helped the group to bond. These young women identified their needs and the facilitator did her best within the resources available to meet them:

I don't think there was any way it could be better. Cos once we went into the room it was kinda like our little room. Our little space. And we were given the opportunity to do anything we wanted. Not what (facilitator) said ... that you have to do this every week. It wasn't like that. It was kind of a relaxed atmosphere. That was brilliant like. That we could go in, and we could say, and do, what we wanted in there. And it was our little area. And nobody could intrude in there. That was good. It was good for us that we weren't kinda stuck to “Oh you have to do certain things”. And you have to do it a certain way. So we could relax, and do at our own pace, and so it was great (SPACE participant no. 5).

#### **7.6.3.3.4 SPACE process: Branching out, building supportive friendships**

As previously stated, the young women accessed learning opportunities outside the SPACE project. They also met each other in between SPACE sessions, calling to see each other, and supporting each other, according to one young woman, ‘we had each other for support. If one of us was having a bad day we'd call to one house, they talk to us, you would feel better then, and be grand’ (SPACE participant no. 5). They



began to socialise together and at one point even went away on a weekend trip to Killarney. During the focus group they recalled how they attended a session on Friday nights and on the way to the school 'used to go to Freda's chinese takeaway and sit in the kitchen [in school] and eat it - no rice- just curry' and chat to each other:

We became good friends. We started socialising outside. We started going out. We actually went away on a weekend, all of us. We went to Killarney, all of us. A girls weekend. It was great. A great time, I don't know where we got the money. We done a sponsored walk. Sure the walk was out to your house Ann and back again (SPACE participant no. 6).

#### **7.6.3.4 SPACE: Conclusion, relationships, results and processes making a difference**

The SPACE programme operated for two years, with one cohort of participants. Young mothers met on a weekly basis to discuss issues, identify needs, and take time for themselves. This group of young women felt isolated prior to the development of SPACE. Involvement with SPACE had a transformational impact on their lives. On a personal level their confidence and self-esteem grew, they made new friends and began to socialise again. Some participants returned to formal education, while others sought employment. They believed the SPACE project also had a positive impact on their young babies, who had the opportunity to play with other children in a stimulating safe environment.

Target individuals, whether adult learners, children or members of the SPACE project, were loud in their praise of how KCP impacted on their lives. The safe, nurturing environment common across all strands of KCP meant participants felt secure and cared for. They had the space to care for each other also.

#### **7.6.4 Non-target individuals**

The non-target individuals on whom the project had an impact include the teachers and ancillary staff working in the host school. It also includes the tutors who worked with the children in the 'Three O'Clock School' and who worked with the adult learners. Finally this group also includes members of the statutory funding agency who supported KCP and volunteers. I will not address the impact of KCP on this group in the same detail as I addressed the target group. However, I do want to share the impact of KCP on this group, since the research findings indicate that KCP

impacted on job satisfaction, career directions, development of personal skills as well as providing a vehicle to contribute to society. In Chapter Nine, 'Researcher as Participant', I share the impact of KCP on my own life.

#### **7.6.4.1 Non target individuals: Tutors working with adults and children**

I interviewed six tutors who worked with KCP, all of whom worked within the adult education programme and two of whom also worked in the 'Three O'Clock School'. As previously discussed children and adult learners related very positively to their tutors, believing their tutors took a personal interest, and went beyond the call of duty to ensure the learners developed skills, confidences, resilience, and competence in various areas. In the course of my research the tutors themselves spoke of the impact working in KCP had on them as individuals. They said it impacted on the quality of their lives, nurtured the development of their own skills, and transformed their world-view. They said they got great satisfaction from seeing adults and children achieve their goals. Furthermore they said that being involved with KCP offered them the opportunity to contribute to making the world a better place.

All the tutors I interviewed spoke of their sense of enjoyment in working with KCP. As one long-term tutor said 'they [the classes] were great fun, even for me, they were great fun, there was a sense of camaraderie'. They enjoyed the atmosphere, ethos, and the fact that KCP was part of a school-based community learning service. They relished the achievements of their students. They enjoyed the multi-service nature of the school, and referred to the respectful relationships they enjoyed with the workers on the FÁS CE Scheme, the teachers, and the children in the school. Most adult classes are located in the kitchen which has the only source of hot water in the school, and sometimes adult classes are interrupted to collect equipment stored in the kitchen, or to access the hot water. The following excerpt from a tutor shows her appreciation for the respect shown to her class from other services in the school:

I like working, I do like working here now. Even the FÁS workers. They are very good as well. If they wanted a bucket of water for the playschool, they would say "I'm sorry to interrupt". A thing you wouldn't take any notice of. But they wouldn't just barge in. They would knock and say, "I'm sorry I do need ... " and "I need it for ... " You know... And I mean you kind of think about all that. And you take that into consideration too. And that amounts to a lot (Tutor no. 2).

The interviews I held with the former ‘Three O’Clock School’ participants and with the adult learners revealed a high level of respect, and indeed love for the tutors who had worked with them. These interview participants felt they could approach their tutors and get assistance with the subject they were teaching, or get assistance with personal issues. They said that when they were missing from classes, the tutors followed up on them, calling to homes or phoning them to ensure they were well. It was gratifying to interview the tutors and confirm that they knew they were held in such high esteem by both the adult and child learners. The tutors I interviewed believed that the respect in which they were held was manifested through the nature of relationships and the quality of interaction they had with their students. They understood that they were trusted implicitly, and that the honest nature of interaction was testimony to the respect in which they were held. This is how one of the tutors defined the respectful relationship with students:

Respect means if you disagree with me you would say it to me. If I say something you don’t understand, that it is my problem. Cos I am trying to communicate with you. So you say that to me. And I make the correction. Disrespect would be not giving as much as you are getting ... I get interest, I get enjoyment from it. ...It’s not good enough to show up to class. You must show up with your brain switched on. You must be some bit focused. And if nothing else, if you just enjoy listening to people talk, or me talk. And be part of the class, then that’s ok. Disrespect would be showing up and interfering for no valid reason. That doesn’t happen out here (Tutor no. 1).

I interviewed tutors who worked in both a paid and voluntary capacity with KCP over time. Tutors came from different social backgrounds to the context in which KCP is situated. They were aware that they had experienced the benefits that educational attainment and employment brings. The experience of working in a community education context had a transformational effect on their lives. They realised the extent of advantages they had in their lives, and how some people did not have the range of opportunities that comes with having money. They also learned to appreciate the personal strengths of people who had to manage the challenges of life with little material resources. The following extract is from an interview with a tutor who had a great passion to share learning with her students, and a realisation, that while she had particular advantages or skills, many of the learners she worked with had wonderful resilience. Working with KCP profoundly affected her life:

It made me very grateful for what I had. And it made me realise that there was more to life than enjoying yourself. That you have to spread it around. I have always had this theory that we are all in this together and if am ... you know I was really surprised at what they didn't know.<sup>9</sup> And the simplicity of the enjoyment that they had do you know what I mean? ... I found people helped us. They gave us computers. And other people annoyed me. They gave me toys for the 'Three O'Clock School', broken. I never gave them to you. I put them into the bin. Or the way people .... or people that gave me books that were damp or smelt. They all went in the bin too. You'd be surprised the people who did it, you know. There is still that thing in Limerick, that thing of us and them. It actually gave me an insight into people. I had a great respect for the women, I feel if I was living in the conditions they were living under, I wonder how would I last with their level of education you know. They were probably managing better than I would have managed you know. I mean some of the women manage extremely well. And they could show you. I respect anyone with humour and courage (Tutor no. 6).

Tutors spoke of the personal affect it had on their lives, the satisfaction it gave them to contribute to the community and the sense of personal achievement they got. There is a poignant moment in the following interview when the tutor speaks of meeting her students 'at a level of women'. Both tutor and student divested of their backgrounds, united in the quest for learning:

It affected me greatly. When my own children grew up, it gave me a sense of purpose and community. That I was giving something back. But I got great, immense enjoyment out of it. After being there so long now, seeing it growing, and seeing what's happening, and walking in knowing that ... I ... someone who is way out [not living in the area] is part of it you know. And I like being part of it. Greeted as a fellow human. We just meet at a level of women, without any background. They only know me as they see me. And I know them as I see them. It gave me a great sense, a feeling that I had done something, d'you know what I mean. When I look back from my death bed I'll say I did something (Tutor no. 6).

The research strongly indicates that tutors enjoyed working with KCP, which was both professionally and personally satisfying. However, working in a community capacity, paid part-time hours, without contractual stability proved a challenge for some of the tutors. They loved the work, and indeed their long term commitment and dedication is evidenced in the quality of outcomes for themselves and their students. However, they sometimes felt aggrieved that community education offers poor career paths and opportunities. The success of community-based educational initiatives is very dependent on the personal commitment of individual tutors. It is crucial that they are respected and supported to work effectively.

Tutors used the mechanism of comparison to explain the empowering processes involved in working with KCP. One former tutor had extensive experience working

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<sup>9</sup> In this the tutor is referring to so called public resources such as parks and museums that the learners would not have had access to.

in both the formal and less formal educational sector. She believed that her experience of teaching in KCP empowered her and affirmed her skills, and motivated her to explore career opportunities. She got such a sense of satisfaction from working with the adults that it had a life changing impact on her:

I had been in a work situation, where I felt I had an awful lot to give and I felt that the structures weren't there for me to do it, that I was being restricted and I had a lot more to give than I was being allowed to. I felt it was very frustrating. The work and the situation of the children ... and everything was very depressing. And I'd be crying, you know the way, I really found it very difficult. And this [working in KCP] was just pure joy. Something I went out to [the class] and I could see them [adult learners] growing in front of my eyes. I could see the development happening, I could see the potential and it gave me great satisfaction that I could be part of that. And that somehow the skill I had with these women and that I was able to work with them in that creative kind of a way you know. They themselves took ownership of their own learning and you know that type of thing. I knew that [empowerment and taking ownership] had started before I left. And it was tremendous satisfaction it was pure ... I mean ... I went out to enjoy myself. I wasn't going out to do something for anybody else. It was pure enjoyment then that particular group. And you know those sessions, and it helped to convince me that I could do things am you know, and it also convinced me that I needed to move on [there was] huge development in it for me personally. It affected my life significantly, and I knew that I needed to work in that kind of a way with people. And I knew that it would be good working with older people and not just children (Tutor no. 4).

The impact of involvement with KCP for the tutor quoted above culminated in a change of career. She saw her work with KCP as 'a preparation for me for 10 years of work. I got a fantastic amount out of it, I really enjoyed it, and I think of it with tremendous warmth and excitement still' (Tutor no. 4).

The impact of tutors therefore was at a personal and professional level. They valued highly the warm respectful relationships which they encountered with children and adults, and enjoyed working in a centre which was brimming with life and activity.

#### **7.6.4.2 Non target individuals: Teachers working within the host school**

KCP also impacted on the teachers working in the school. I have already discussed the positive proactive relationships between parents and teachers in the school. This respectful adult to adult relationship is characterised by on-going communication, relating on a first name basis, teacher's genuine interest in parental learning, an understanding of the child in the context of family and a commitment to making learning accessible for children and adults. Teachers spoke of the joy of working in a multi-service school, and again contrasted it to the normal mainstream model, where

schools open between nine and three and there is minimal parental involvement, and traditionally very different types of relationships between the adults in the child's life. Teachers embraced their role in terms of working as part of a team to ensure the school ran efficiently and children reached their potential. The team included other teachers, FÁS CE workers, Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) as well as parents of the children. The following extract from a teacher in the focus group captures the collaborative culture of the school:

I have to pay tribute to the staff. I think their attitude is crucial here, and that they are very professional in their attitude. They don't feel threatened. They don't get on their high horse about a person who has less academic qualifications. They are quite happy to share ... That's a mark of a true professional ... The ethos is 'we are all in this together, we all have something to give we can all learn from each other (Teacher no. 1).

Teachers felt that the team of staff, which included SNAs and FÁS CE workers, and the caretaker contributed to the overall effective working of the school, and ultimately to the quality of service to children which of course is central to the work of the school:

Its a good idea [multi-service use of school] to think of what we have achieved and what we have got out of it ourselves as staff and also the pupils you know what I mean. Its well worth it I think. Children need a mix, to see different things going on, to see the different levels that are there, to see that everybody can work together. I think that's why it works because they see the staff getting on. They see everybody that works in the school getting on together, and talking to each other. I think that does rub off ... d'you know. They see the adults all getting on. It has to have an effect somewhere along the line (Teacher no. 4).

KCP committee members very much value the relationship between the teachers and the project. Like the previous interviewee, they believe that using the school as a multi-service site positively affects the children, as their parents and neighbours attend classes. The KCP committee focus group believe that there is a very practical outcome from the positive and frequent interactions of parents and teachers. The interview excerpt outlined below profiles the practical outcomes of the trusting relationship between these key adults in the child's life:

Voice 1: Everyone is on a first name, no miss this and miss that, which is only something that you have had in recent years. With our project you've always had it ... In schools it was a closed shop ...

Voice 2: Distant very distant

Voice 1: With with parents and people coming into the school and they [teachers] have had a good come back on that as well. Parents are now on a very friendly basis and are more inclined to take what teachers say on board as against ... 'my

child is this or that', cos they can see first hand what way the teachers are reacting to the children the children reacting to what parents are saying.

The ancillary staff are very complimentary of the ethos of the school and the role teachers play in building that inclusive ethos. The following excerpt from a member of ancillary staff highlights the ethos, and the extent to which teachers are proactive in creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere:

Its so friendly, its brilliant. People walk in, the parents walk in, no matter who they meet they are all greeted, and again it's all first name terms. Its great, it doesn't matter whether the child is going to the crèche or to first class all the parents are greeted the same way, and friendly. And if they are going to see anybody along the way, along the hall a teacher or whatever, they will come out and straight away the teacher will know the person by first name. You know it is brilliant it is (Ancillary staff no. 1).

Staff admit that working in the school is quite different from other schools, there is more going on, more people hovering around and a strong likelihood of meeting other adults:

When I first started I was very surprised to see people in the kitchen. And I remember going in the first day to the staff room [kitchen] and being totally shocked by this crowd that was there, but it made it more ... that ... to me now it doesn't even ... the two [school and KCP] are just one ... they are not two separate issues at all. There's not the school and the classes [KCP] like ... I look forward to Thursday when the cookery class ... getting a scone ... they are always keeping stuff for you. And if you come in they are always asking me questions ... again ... about you or whatever else, and talking away and friendly. And they are inviting you out to places if they are going somewhere. And there's the atmosphere it continues on ... The children have no problem going into the kitchen to get a spoon do you know. And they [adult learners] never turn a child away. And if they meet one of the children in the corridor they are always talking to them as well. I think that helps as well (Teacher no. 4).

Teachers very much appreciate the relationships they have with the learners in the adult classes. If they call to the kitchen for break, or to collect equipment, they are made welcome, and included in the conversations. The following dialogue from the teacher's focus group gives an insight into the shared space of kitchen. I have previously spoken of how adult learners were included in teachers' conversations about holidays or whatever. The following excerpt is an example of how adult learners include teachers in their conversations:

Voice 1: [the adult learners were] talking about the Aran islands, I was standing at the radiator

Voice 2: They were going back over the years. It was very funny

Voice 1: I was in convulsions [laughing]. There's herself and [adult learner] and a few others they were sitting talking away about this boat journey and I was killing myself laughing. The things they were saying. They don't stop talking about what they are talking about if you walk into the room it continues on

Voice 3: Even the scones Thursday and Friday at the table for break  
Voice 2: That's great you know. Nothing is held back. And that's great whatever people have to say they say. And I have been in other schools and I would say myself it wouldn't have been ... let go fully.

Teachers enjoy working in the school, and compared the camaraderie they felt, the team work ethos, and the collaborative culture with prior experiences:

Voice 1: It [KCP] brings people into the school  
Voice 2: We don't notice it sure we don't [it doesn't interfere with the running of the school]  
Voice 3: Its great to work in a school with all this going on  
Voice 1: Its much livelier. It's not dead. You know there is no doors closed. You know some schools the doors are all closed and 'it's my domain' and I'm in here and that's it.  
Voice 2: That's right  
Voice 1: There's no domains here  
Voice 2: Nobody shuts their door to anybody. Everybody's door is open  
Voice 3: Everybody is made welcome.

This is how one teacher compared her previous teaching post with her present position as a classroom teacher in the school:

Normally you were coming in and your classroom is your classroom. Nobody else was allowed into your classroom. You were stuck with your classroom till break times. The only other people you see then was the other members of staff. You didn't mix with auxillary staff. You didn't mix with anybody else. It was very rigid and when your day goes like that it gets boring and tiring, and you just you get fed up with it. Here you could meet anybody and every day is a new experience, and every day something different happens. So its not a chore coming in, and its a pleasure actually you actually look forward to coming in (Teacher no. 4).

Another teacher reflected on the challenges working in the school brought to teachers coming from more traditional schools:

For a new teacher it is different. And I would say maybe the new teacher sometimes is not sure how to how to manage. That's not the right word now ... how to ... it is totally different from being in a school school. And I see it myself. It takes teachers a while to develop a relationship with the adults within the classes or even with the parents. Cos they are used to coming from the more rigid structures. But I must say credit to everybody, every teacher we have taken in has definitely found it something very positive. I ask them you know after about a year 'what do you think of all this'? And the feedback has always been positive. Definitely some teachers might find it uncomfortable in the beginning because of prior experience.

#### **7.6.4.3 Non target individuals: Ancillary staff working within the host school**

Support staff or ancillary staff who worked in the school included caretakers, FÁS CE workers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). I will not refer to them as individual groups in discussing their attitudes to the school since the numbers were



small and they could be easily identified. Some ancillary staff had been KCP participants, and therefore had an intimate knowledge of the project. The impact of KCP is discussed in the context of the overall experience of working in the school for ancillary staff. They enjoyed the multi-service nature of the school, knew the tutors and adult learners by first names, and supported KCP by preparing rooms for use and helping out where possible. Ancillary staff were very happy working in the school. They felt they were valued members of a team, and that their contributions were appreciated. They were very conscious of the inclusive school ethos which valued their contributions to the overall working of the school. In particular they spoke of their relationships with teachers, who treated them as co-workers, and they were conscious of the lack of discrimination between teachers and ancillary staff. As with other aspects of the research, participants used the tool of comparison as a means of communicating their opinions.

The ancillary staff spoke of parity of esteem, of being treated equally, of being valued, and finally of being consulted about their work. This working relationship was based on mutual give and take and the underlying ingredient was respect. Respect for what each person contributed to the overall working of the school. In the following extract a member of ancillary staff describes the inclusive nature of the school, and indeed relates how new teachers get support from ancillary staff who have been working in the school prior to the new teacher's arrival. Interestingly this research participant also mentions the pre-school and the caretaker as well as the teachers, giving the impression of a seamless holistic service:

They are very fair here I have to say that. They make you feel at ease and everyone is the same whether they are teachers or Special Needs or whatever. Pre-school teachers they are fantastic as well. They really look to us for the bit of help when they come in cos they are starting afresh themselves, do you know what I mean. Really here they are very good I have to say (caretaker) everyone (Ancillary staff no. 3).

Ancillary staff felt valued and feel appreciated for what they do. They were all conscious of not being 'told' but rather being asked to carry out tasks, and being consulted about their work. One of the ancillary staff offered an insight into the respectful interaction between teachers and ancillary staff: 'they appreciate what you do as well. It's all 'thank you very much' and 'thanks very much for doing that'. And no such thing as you have to do it and that's your job' (Ancillary staff no. 3).

Ancillary staff enjoyed working in the school, they did not feel they were in any way seen as less important, and felt the team effort was central to their enjoyment of their work which they considered was highly valued. There was a strong sense of camaraderie and they did not feel they would be designated the ‘crappy jobs’, as the following extract shows:

There is nothing [principal] wouldn't ask me to do she wouldn't do herself. Just because you are the FÁS worker it doesn't mean you have all the crappy jobs to do. If the floor needs to be swept cleaned or the cups, she would wash em herself. She would dry em if I was washing em. Do you know that kind of a way  
(Ancillary staff no. 3).

Ancillary staff were also conscious of the multi-service nature of the school. They visited the kitchen to collect equipment when adult classes were going on and knew the adult learners by name, felt they were friendly and might often have a chat with them. Ancillary staff also worked in the crèche and pre-school as well as in the classrooms. They enjoyed the interaction with adult learners, teaching staff, and children. Ancillary staff were also very aware of different aspects of the project, and of the value to the adult learners. They often had a chat with them at break time, as one member of ancillary staff stated, ‘I think the mothers enjoy the classes, very friendly, could be chatting for half an hour, better get back to work’ (Ancillary staff no. 4). They felt they were treated with respect by all concerned, even the children as the following extract shows:

Very friendly atmosphere. Everyone seems to get along.  
The children don't seem to have any barriers with any of the adults here. They treat everyone the same. They do what you tell them regardless of who you are. That's what I think now ... whether you are a teacher or a helper they just have respect for other people even though they are all on first name terms like  
(Ancillary staff no. 4).

In summary, ancillary staff felt valued, consulted, and respected. They enjoyed the multi-service nature of their working environment and their interaction with children and adults. Their perception of the school environment was one in which children were valued, whether they were in the crèche, pre-school, or school. They also believed that all adults contributed to creating a homely nurturing learning environment be they teachers, ancillary staff, or learners or tutors involved in KCP.

#### **7.6.4.4 Non target individuals: Statutory agency personnel**

City of Limerick Vocational Educational Committee (CLVEC) supported KCP by supplying tutors for the classes, and facilitating grant applications. I interviewed a key member of CLVEC who was very familiar with the evolution and nature of KCP. According to this interviewee, KCP represented an innovative approach to building educational capital and providing accessible learning opportunities to people who had not benefited fairly from the education system. This research participant acknowledged the impact her interaction with KCP had on her own life and on her skill development:

I'll say one thing about KCP. It was very much part of my own education. I had come from a rural background, and I would have known very little about an inner city way of life. It would have been a culture that I wouldn't have been at all familiar with, so I said that I learned a lot about people ... especially as I was being paid to provide a service. And I really think that part of my own learning was to get to know and understand local communities, particularly ones I would not be familiar with that were not part of my own earlier experience. And I think it is essential you know to ... It is important to keep learners to the fore. So for people like me you have to be open to learning open to seeing the learner as a .... creating a system for learners really ( Statutory agency interviewee).

### **7.7 Impact of Kileely Community Project on the ecologies of home, school and community**

The previous sections explored the impact of KCP on individuals. This section looks specifically at the three ecologies of home, school, and community and explores the impact of the project on them as distinct entities.

#### **7.7.1 Impact of Kileely Community Project on the host school**

In this section I examine the impact of KCP on the school. The relationships between school staff, school staff and parents, school staff and families, school staff and KCP tutors have all been explored in the previous section. This section explores how the school as an organisation was affected by the presence of KCP.

Prior to the foundation of KCP in 1985, the host school operated very much like all other schools. KCP brought a cultural change to the school which radically changed how it operated. The following excerpt from an interview with a teacher who worked in the school prior to and during stage 1 of the project from 1985 to 1991 describes how the school had operated independent of the community:

St. Lelia's was a small school, five classrooms, within a small confined community, and most of the pupils came from this local area, but there was no real connection between the two. We were the school and they were the community. Real life began outside the school (Teacher no. 5).

As she worked in the school during the first phase of project development, she witnessed the transformation in how the school and community related to each other. In her own words:

Ann Higgins brought these two often disparate areas of life together. Children and parents used the same building. It became part of community life. Instead of parents waiting at the front door for emergent children, they were allowed in the corridors and acquired a knowledge of school routine (Teacher no. 5).

Interestingly she also highlighted the potential disruption to school routine when other services were located in the school. Fear of disruption to the learning environment is I believe a concern which might be shared by many teachers. As previously stated in this chapter, the relationships between teachers and parents is built on respect, which is manifested through honest and open relationships, and a collaborative culture in which parents and teachers value each other's input into the child's life:

They [parents] never interfered in any aspect of school life. It might be imagined that they would be knocking on classroom doors, enquiring about their offspring, but this never happened. School life was allowed to continue uninterrupted. This was because of a latent attitude of cooperation and respect that Ann Higgins brought to fruition in the participants in her project (Teacher no. 5).

The sentiments expressed are echoed in the following quotation in which a member of staff describes the nature of interaction of KCP with the school. There are strong similarities in their respective interviews in terms of how each teacher identified the respectful nature of the relationship between services, and the 'added value' brought to the school environment by the presence of KCP in the school:

KCP wouldn't interfere with the running of the school. This school has become a place of learning for everybody. And it's important that everybody knows that, and feels that, and by coming in and being part of it I believe people do. You can see it from people. You know it ... So having the project within the school has made the school inclusive for everybody. And it has made it a learning centre for the community, rather than a school for children in isolation (Teacher no. 2).

One of the former teachers I interviewed believed the impact of the KCP had both an 'overt as well as subtle' impact. It was 'overt in terms of smells and sounds' and 'subtle in the attitudes of parents and children alike towards staff and also towards school discipline' (Teacher no. 5).

The consensus among research participants is that the location of KCP in the school built positive, respectful, collaborative relationships between home, school, and community. I asked a senior member of staff working in the school at the time of interview to describe the relationship between the school, preschool, crèche, adult morning and evening classes and the 'Three O'Clock School'. In the follow extract she describes the symbiotic relationships between services, made physically visible through the nature of interaction between adults working and learning in the building. When you walk into the school and you meet an adult it is not apparent whether that person is a teacher, FÁS CE worker, SNA, adult learner, or tutor. They are all engaged in the work of teaching and learning, all supporting each other. It is immediately apparent that adults interact naturally and easily in this nurturing learning environment:

It's a very positive relationship. There are no barriers between any of those groups that you named out. I would say if someone walked in here and saw them all if they were to be all put together in the kitchen area at any given time. I don't think people would be able to differentiate between all those different groups, it's really important it makes the school what it is (Teacher no. 2).

In the following extract another teacher advocates for a 'fudging of boundaries' so that the key stakeholders in the child's life irrespective of educational background work together and value each other's contribution. This teacher believes that when parents and teachers work collaboratively they bring an 'added value', to the life of the school. This teacher viewed collaboration as a professional enrichment process, a process of human growth and development for adults as well as for children:

Fudging the boundaries is so important. Again there is a problem there in that teachers feel 'we are the professionals, we did our 3 years in college'. And they have problems with this fudging of boundaries but I think the moment you start drawing demarcation lines you are in trouble. It's the combined effort that matters and using, utilising, maximising the skills, parents have their skills and teachers need to see that, and the added value that parents bring to a school (Teacher no. 1).

I asked the tutors to describe the relationship between the school and KCP. As previously mentioned, the tutors believed that they were respected for the work they did. If their classes were disturbed it was to collect equipment, and there was always a knock on the door and an apology or an explanation for the disturbance. This is how one of the adult tutors described the relationship between the school and KCP:

The relationship between the adult classes and school is very very good. Because none of the teachers will inconvenience the classes in any way. They won't ever ... you know ... and we ... their time ... and we make a point of being gone because they need to discuss what has gone on in the morning for them. So when they are on their way in we try to have ... be gone ... as long as we have the kettles ready for them ... the kettles boiled ... we make scones or a bit of apple tart and we leave it there for the workers and the teachers we always make a point of leaving something for them. Now Ann there is a very good relationship I have to say a very very good relationship (Tutor no. 2).

It is also of note, that when the cookery class leave fresh scones for tea break they leave enough for the teachers and the ancillary staff. That is a very practical example of how all workers irrespective of role are valued equally in the school building. And this inclusive ethos is not lost on the ancillary staff who, as previously indicated, felt that the school benefited from the multi-service inclusive nature of the building. In the following extract a member of ancillary staff describes how she sees the interrelationship between KCP and the school:

Like the cookery girls have been great. They always think of everybody. They enjoy what they are doing. They have a laugh and if you come in they'll talk to you and have a joke with you. And they always seem to think of everybody. They always leave something there [in the kitchen], they have cooked you know (Ancillary staff no. 4).

The cookery class also held a cake sale to raise funds 'for the Principal'. They felt it was a practical way in which they could show their appreciation to the school for giving the project a home in which they were welcome and valued. The issue of the cake sale contributing to the school arose in interviews with both adults, teachers, and tutors:

The cake sale, a few pound for [principal], over she leaving us have the classes here. We usually do a cake sale at the end of the year for a few pound for [principal] the electricity, its nice to do something for her (Tutor no. 2).

People attending the classes here are really interested in what is happening to the school. They are the first to say we will do a bake, we will raise money, we will make something and we will raffle it. You know that type of support (Adult learner and member of KCP committee no. 2).

One adult learner I spoke with believed that people got 'personally involved'. This was not only reflected in how the adult classes operated but in how the school operated. She believed that attending the school has a long-term positive impact on the children who experience a high degree of care, as well as a superb education. Finally, she was at a loss to describe the 'overall package', the ethos and the atmosphere, and said that 'it's nothing you can say, Ann, it's tangible':

...the child is happy in the school. Sure God help us. We have children gone into sixth class and they want to come back here to go into Juniors. They will talk about this school for the rest of their lives. And that's great cos this is the formative years. And I have to say even the staff get so personally involved. We've had babies from 2 and 3 months here, and when they come in we say that was your little handprint. Everyone gets so personally involved with everyone. They really care about the kids and the adults, it's nothing you can say Ann it's tangible (Adult learner and member of KCP committee no. 2).

KCP did not have a 'tenant relationship' with the school. It was not 'tolerated' as something that might be good for adults and children in the community. Rather the relationship was interactive, a bit like your beloved granny coming to stay in your home in comparison to a guest staying in a hotel. As the householder, the school was conscious of KCP's needs, and also of the contribution KCP could make to the school. In that way, the 'school' transformed from a service to children with minimal parental and community involvement to a multi-service entity which offered adults and children a variety of learning opportunities, both within and outside school hours.

The results for the host school of having KCP located in the school were very positive. Teachers and parents met daily, interacted easily, and developed a working relationship and a trust. This was nowhere more evident than when an issue arose in relation to a child. In the following extracts adult learners and teachers recount the ease with which difficult situations can be addressed because of the pre-existing relationships between parents and teachers. According to one interviewee a very practical outcome for teachers is the ease with which they can communicate with parents even when difficulties need to be solved. The teachers' focus group captures this sentiment:

Voice 1: I suppose we have always created a sense of fairness and fairness earns respect and I often would say to parents, if there is an issue you know, I'd say 'You know me and you know all our staff here<sup>10</sup>, that we are doing this<sup>11</sup> for the sake of your child and for no other reason'. And they see that. If we have difficulties with children, we have to tackle it. But they (parents) can also see that we are fair as well and that is very important because then they will trust us in what we do

Voice 2: It's bonds of trust are there

Voice 3: And because the pupils are seeing us respecting the parents, the parents respecting us and us respecting each other in school, and in the class ... there's a rub off<sup>12</sup>

Voice 4: There's a connection, we all connect you see.

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<sup>10</sup> Here the teacher is referring to the pre existing relationship between teachers and parents.

<sup>11</sup> This refers to making an intervention to improve the child's behaviour, attendance or performance.

<sup>12</sup> This teacher is referring to the trickle down effect to the children from observing positive interaction between teachers and parents, in other words teacher and parent interaction is seen as role modelling.

The sentiments are also echoed by the KCP committee focus group:

Parents are now on a very friendly basis and are more inclined to take what teachers say on board as against ... 'my child is this or that', cos they can see first hand what way the teachers are reacting to the children, the children reacting to what parents are saying

Voice 2: Its good for the children to see the parents coming in and out. Its a great link, well when they see their mothers coming in and the fact that their mothers are going to a class it makes it great ... Its 'we're not the only ones going to school, my mother is going to school as well'

As previously discussed the presence of KCP in the school enabled the development of positive working relationships between people, and between services. Furthermore, many of the interview participants believed the location of KCP in the school actually 'saved' the school, as one participant said 'it's great to see loads of people coming in and out, cos it had gone to one class, and it looked like it was going to go' (SPACE participant no. 1). In Chapter Six, 'Journey of Hope: Transference, Transition and Transformation', I described how the school had become a one-teacher school, and the building itself had become dilapidated. The project brought people into the school, renewed local interest in the school, and according to research participants contributed significantly to the survival of the school. One participant who has been involved over the lifetime of the project contrasted the present accommodation shortage with the early days, in her own words, 'we have no rooms now, in the beginning we had rooms to let' (Mature adult learner no. 1). The following excerpt from a SPACE participant showcases her attachment to the school, and her awareness of the precarious position the school was in for a period of time:

It would have been bad to see it [the school] go. It's like a family school, all of us went here. I think the school has gotten more important to the community over the last couple of years I think the community did kind of lose sight of it for a little while. But am I think once things started happening in the school ... I think people became more aware of the school still being here. So once the classes [KCP] and everything started it got more people interested in what the school was like. And there's teachers there and they are doing very well. And they [parents] kind of started to bring their kids back. Cos at one stage, I think the community was sending their kids elsewhere do you know. They did kinda lose sight of the school but I think once the classes [KCP] started up I think that's what brought people in. They started to see what the school was like and said 'Oh God the school is still going here. We could send the kids here', you know so in that sense I think it was great, and helped to revive the school (SPACE participant no. 4).

There was a strong consensus of the value KCP brought to the school across all categories of research participants. As previously indicated enrolment had decreased, my teacher status was temporary, and the building was in need of urgent and significant repair. The following interview extracts showcase the attachment people



had to the school, their value for the work I did in the school and in KCP, and their pride in the school. One young mother shared her joy at the regeneration of the school, made all the more necessary by what she perceived as the negative influences which prevail in the area:

[the community] did need it [ KCP, and the regeneration of the school]. The likes of the things coming on the news, if they're out, they are killing one another, and they are doing this and they are doing that. And then you have a school up there that's achieving, it did achieve so much Ann, it did achieve a good lot now. It was gone down for a while, kids you know what I mean were not going in there. All of a sudden a big rush for the kids going in there and that's how you know it has been a big achievement in the school Ann, you know it did now. It's absolutely excellent up there now, and its spotless up there. It was ran down Ann for a while now you know that yourself Ann from working up there, I hate to ... It has been brought up very good, everything up to date, the classrooms and all are spotless. You did achieve a good lot with that school now Ann give credit where tis due like (Young adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 1).

In the following extracts a former SPACE participant acknowledges my work for the school, and shares her belief that the classes [KCP] impacted significantly on the regeneration of the school:

The credit has to go to you. You were the major part, you were the one that pushed it and pushed it and you kept it going. Only for you this school would have closed years ago. You kept it going, started the classes [KCP] and encouraged the people and you know, it is very hard to describe Ann (Young adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 2).

The committee focus group are very conscious of the positive impact KCP had on the school. Furthermore they are conscious of the feelings of the Principal on this subject:

Voice I: [Principal] even to this day will say that because this [KCP] was going on, that the numbers rose in the school, wouldn't she?  
All: oh yes  
Voice 2: This school would have closed without the project  
Voice 3: She does  
Voice 1: When there were very few children here we were here slogging away and kept it open to the parents, and when the parents saw the welcome in the school they decided to bring their children here  
Voice 2: That's very positive. If a principal is trying to get the numbers up in her school she has to have the confidence of the parents, and that only comes if they are coming into the school and meeting people, whether it is the teachers or people using the classes, on a personal level.

Finally, a mother and daughter who had been involved in with various aspects of KCP over time believed the regeneration of the school was intrinsically linked to the development of KCP:

Voice 1: You did so much for that school Ann. You kinda put Kileely school back on the map in a way.

Voice 2: Cos it was kinda dying out wasn't it? The numbers were going down hill, and then with all those classes you got [KCP], it was noticed then you see,

Voice 1: Because the school could have ended up like so many, a neglected empty building. That's what it could have ended up like eventually Ann, you know what I mean.

Voice 2: With all the classes going on [KCP] there now that will never happen

(interview with a mature and young adult learner).

One very practical outcome for the school was the decrease in vandalism due to the increased use of the school in the evening time. In stage 2 we erected a railing around the yard area which removed access to the sides and back of the school grounds.

Chapter Five, 'Area Profile', describes the changes made during the renovation of the school. The teacher's focus group made a link between the ownership of the school by the community and the decrease in vandalism, stating that when people feel they 'owned the school ... they don't vandalise what they see as their own property'.

All schools are busy places. Educating children from an ecological perspective means the school is an even busier place. Adapting an ecological perspective and nurturing a multi-service environment has implications for everyone working and learning in the school in whatever context. If a school chooses to operate from an ecological perspective, as the host school for this project did, attention must be paid to the processes by which services interact, space and resources are shared, and decisions are made.

In summary, the location of KCP in the school enabled positive parent/teacher, and school/community relationships. Many believe that in fact that KCP injected life into the school and saved it from closing entirely.

### **7.7.2 Impact of Kileely Community Project on the home**

In this section I acknowledge the impact of KCP on the home. KCP impacted on the quality of life of individuals attending the project and had spin off effects into their home environment, as one interviewee put it, 'if you are a happy person, the people around you are going to be happier, as well I mean, aren't they? It stands to reason. It rubs off'. One of the ancillary staff said 'it's a good idea to get out of the house cos you are a different person when you get back' (Ancillary staff no. 2). Adult learners spoke of the going back into the home environment feeling refreshed having had 'a break' from the home. They brought new skills into the home environment, including

cooking, sewing, knitting, and literacy. They also brought practical knowledge about how they could actively support their children's learning. Thus KCP built the social and human capital resources of the home ecology.

Homes also changed because women were not at home seven days and nights per week as had been the case prior to their involvement with KCP. When women spoke of the changes in their lifestyles due to involvement in KCP they highlighted the positive impact on themselves as individuals, and their increased capacity to deal with issues as they arose in the home. Indeed, KCP built resilience which enabled these women, be they adult learners or SPACE participants to deal with whatever problems or challenges came their way.

Some of our classes had intergenerational attendance, bringing mothers, daughters, aunts, and nieces together in a warm nurturing fun learning environment. In the case of the 'Three O'Clock School' it brought parents and children together. Another aspect to how KCP affected the home environment is in terms of role modelling. Children saw their mothers, and less frequently their fathers attending adult education classes. The adult learners I interviewed felt this was really great for the children and gave them the clear and positive message in relation to life long learning. Sometimes KCP tutors were known to children and parents and this formed another basis for discussion between adults and children about the nature of learning.

One 'Three O'Clock School' participant smiled with deep satisfaction as she relayed how her 'mother loved the 3 o'clock'. Several of the 'Three O'Clock School' participants believed that the 'Three O'Clock School' was a learning arena for their parents, and described it as 'further education for parents as well as the kids'. They believed that their parents' skills improved and they brought those skills back into the home environment. They spoke with pride of 'learning from their parents' in an environment where 'the interaction was very good ... I don't think there is anyone better to learn from than your parents'. These skills were then brought into the home environment. I remember one sunny day seeing a mother and child walking home from the 'Three O'Clock School' holding hands and laughing and chatting together. It is a memory I cherish.

The young people who came to the 'Three O'Clock School' with their siblings said that attending as a family impacted on the quality of their relationships. As they participated in a programme designed to build a range of skills they grew closer as a family. One young person stated that 'its kinda funny. If we weren't all together in the 3 ... Well myself and [brother] might be friends with someone else, and my sister might be friends with someone else. It kept us all close together' ('Three O'Clock School' participant no. 4).

Research participants also spoke of the value of networking specifically in relation to gathering information about events in the area. They brought this information back into the home environment and shared it with their families. A very practical example of this is the formation of the SPACE project. When adult learners became aware that we were setting up a project they encouraged their daughters to join.

While more in depth research would be needed to fully understand the impact of KCP on the home ecology, it is reasonable to assume that parents and children who benefited from KCP brought those benefits with them back into the home environment. I believe the impact was magnified by intergenerational involvement with KCP as learners of all ages shared their stories, skills and aspirations.

### **7.7.3 Impact of Kileely Community Project on the Community**

Just as individuals are located in homes and schools, homes and schools in turn are located in community. The community context in which KCP evolved has been described in Chapter Five, 'Area Profile', in terms of its social, physical and economic attributes. This section seeks to acknowledge the impact of KCP on the community. It looks at how the community benefited as a result of KCP.

Fundamentally the very nature of community resources changed within Kileely. The school, the only public building, which previously operated within normal school hours, metamorphosed to offer adult and child learning opportunities outside of school hours. It also offered a crèche and a pre-school and for a short time a Saturday morning art class. The school became 'a focal point', a centre for the community, indeed one participant observed that 'KCP kept the school alive, it gave the school a soul in the area'. The following extract from the teachers' focus group shows how a school can become part of the community if it opens its doors:

Voice 1: [KCP] has enlarged the school as a centre for the area

Voice 2: [KCP] has brought others from the community into a school building. It has created ... They see the positive aspects of a school. A community that does not use a school building can feel negative about it because once school hours are over its locked up and that's it. It sits there. There is no negativity around this school really.

These sentiments are echoed by one of the young mothers who values the extended use of the school, 'the fact you are constantly working on the school. And you have people using the school. You are not closing up the school when it closes. Great to have the school constantly open there' (Young adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 1).

Members of the community took up leadership roles. They formed a committee and took responsibility within the school, and for running KCP. They organised holidays, day trips and social events. When KCP activities finish for the summer these same women organised groups to go walking or swimming. Ultimately KCP built social capital. This is explored in depth in Chapter Eight, 'Celebrating the Survival, Success and Sustainability of Kileely Community Project: Excavating the factors that made Kileely Community Project work', one young woman described the process of transformation facilitated through dialogue and networking as follows:

[KCP] gets people more interested in each other and in what's going on in their community. And how they can change it. And what needs to be done, [change happens] by everyone communicating with each other, they are able to change things. And talk about it. And it just you know ... by everyone being involved it gives them a sense of achievement and that's how community works. It's by everyone interacting with everyone (Young adult learner no. 3)

The nature of interaction between community residents changed. Adult learner relationships became 'intimate'. Adults shared joys and troubles. As one SPACE participant observed 'they [adult learners] bond here'. Another adult learner described how prior to involvement people 'would have said hello in the street', but KCP facilitated people to 'get to know each other and to actually get to know them on a one to one basis was lovely. And to find out that they were such nice people ... and we got on well and turned out to be friends and stayed friends'. Finally one mature adult learner lowered her voice and said, '[KCP] was very good for the area. T'was marvellous, anyone will tell you the same thing. They [women] usen't go out. They [women] usen't go anywhere'. Ultimately KCP built social capital, strong networks of support and solidarity. This is true for adults as well as for children. KCP was described as a place where 'friendships were made, women on their own, widows and

everything, they can still go out. It is very difficult for a woman to go out on her own' ( Mature adult learner and committee member no. 1).

KCP employed local people on the FÁS CE Scheme and this offered people a very practical way to contribute to the community.

During the lifetime of KCP it attracted local and national publicity, through newspapers, radio and television. This involved coverage of classes, award ceremonies and celebrations. When the playroom was being installed we also got national television coverage. The participants were very pleased that their area was being profiled in a positive light. While our area had attracted media attention for negative reasons, they felt proud that our project brought positive acknowledgement to the area. So often people living in local authority communities feel branded by the media.

As I have previously discussed people often use comparison as a means to explain a phenomenon. This was very common when people compared their lives prior to and subsequent to involvement in KCP, and also in relation to their school experiences. As people struggled to explain the impact KCP had on the community they again drew on the method of comparison. A number of participants explained the impact of KCP by surmising what its loss would mean. One participant noted that 'If it ever closed down it would be missed badly. It would be missed badly'. Another participant listed very practical and indeed negative outcomes should KCP cease to exist, these included 'increased isolation, increased deviancy, increased opportunities for vandalism, and an increase in anger at a system that is not catering for them'.

## **7.8 Summary**

In this chapter I have explored the impact of KCP on target and non-target individuals under the three headings of relationships, results and process. To a lesser extent I have explored the impact of KCP on the ecologies of home, school, and community.

## 7.9 Chapter conclusion

There is no doubt that KCP had a profound impact on the quality of people's lives. Indeed my research indicated that the needs met by KCP resonated clearly with all levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Some of my research participants acknowledged that KCP addressed their needs at the most basic levels, the Physiological and Security levels. All participants acknowledged the impact of KCP at the social and higher levels of ego. Participants described KCP as place where you could grow, belong, and learn. These experiences built resilience in participants. This resilience was manifested in many different ways. For some 'Three O'Clock School' children it meant they were more confident going into mainstream school. For SPACE participants it meant the support to go back to study or engage in community learning. For adult learners it meant the opportunity to deal with whatever trials life brought with increased confidence and a network of support. Finally, while I address the impact of KCP on myself in the autobiography chapter I also wish to acknowledge it here. KCP built my skills and resilience, through a process of engagement with people, who worked with me to develop a service for the community. Their love, respect, and care for me enabled me to grow in confidence and to build set of skills to carry forward through life.





## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **CELEBRATING THE SURVIVAL, SUCCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF KILEELY COMMUNITY PROJECT, EXCAVATING THE FACTORS THAT MADE KILEELY COMMUNITY PROJECT WORK**



## **8. CELEBRATING THE SURVIVAL, SUCCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF KILEELY COMMUNITY PROJECT: EXCAVATING THE FACTORS THAT MADE KCP WORK**

### **8.1 Introduction**

*Together we're in this relationship  
We've built it with care to last the whole trip  
(Johnny Duhan)*

In 1990, standing in the school corridor, five years into the growth and development of Kileely Community Project (KCP) a teaching colleague asked me the following question. 'Ann', she said, 'I understand why KCP began, what I don't understand is why it is still here?' Confident that KCP was making an impact she was trying to understand the factors which enabled KCP to continue to grow and develop. In this chapter I endeavour to answer her question. In challenging contexts 'the success against the odds are considerable' (Gibson, 1979:13), and this chapter aims to offer an understanding of how our success was achieved.

The survival, success, and sustainability of KCP can, to an extent, be understood with reference to the socio-ecological framework, developed in Chapter Two, 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility', with specific reference to social capital as formerly indicated. Fundamentally KCP embraced a socio-ecological perspective, and was guided by a partnership ethos which was enacted through a strong developmental leadership style. Working from an ecological ethos, KCP recognised the interrelatedness of home, school, and community contexts with their individual and combined potential to impact on the quality of life and learning. If a capital inventory had been carried out in the mid 1980s our study area would have emerged as capital-poor since KCP evolved in a climate of high unemployment and emigration, within a culture of early school leaving, and without any tradition of adult or continuing education. However, against all the odds, as the preceding chapter profiles, KCP had a very significant impact on individual lives and on the ecologies of the home, school, and community. This chapter attempts to explain how this was actually achieved.

I have prioritised the generation and development of social capital as a primary explanation for the survival, success and sustainability of KCP. However, there are a number of complementary variables which also contributed significantly. These

include factors such as the location, size and design of the school, and the willingness of the Board of Management ( BOM) of the school to house KCP, as well as the support of City of Limerick Vocational Educational Committee (CLVEC). These will be addressed later in the chapter.

To an extent social capital theory has been investigated in the context of capital theory in Chapter Two, 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility'. I explore social capital in depth in this chapter and subsequently adopt it as a mechanism to guide an investigation of the factors which facilitated the success, sustainability, and survival of KCP.

## **8.2 Social capital**

In this chapter I identify the development and maintenance of social capital as a core component that made KCP work. Through an intensive process of engagement and participation in KCP activities learners built networks of trust which formed the foundation for successful outcomes and sustainable development.

### **8.2.1 Decoding of social capital**

In this section I will endeavour to explore and interpret the concept of social capital all the while conscious that 'social capital resists simplification' (Lopez and Stack, 2001:31), and indeed that the term 'is in danger of becoming a victim of its own success (Briggs, 1997:1). Cohen advocates an interrogation of what we mean by social capital prior to 'celebrating its divine nature' (2001:267). She notes that for 'many political scientists social capital ... is the building block of civil society' (ibid:267). Social capital has also been defined as 'glue that holds a community together' (Potapchuk et al. 1997:130). While it is both 'intangible and abstract' (Bryk and Schneider 2002:13), it is nonetheless a powerful agent. According to Potachuk social capital is 'much like financial capital', since 'social capital increases with use' (1997:2).

Key capital theorists propose different definitions of social capital. Firstly social capital is conceptualised by Bourdieu as the 'aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network, of more or less

institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership of a group' (1986:248). Coleman defines social capital 'by its function', understood as a 'variety of entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors - whether persons or corporate actors - within a structure' (1988:S98). Finally, Putman emphasises the role social capital plays in supporting a stable society. He defines social capital in relation to 'social organisation such as network, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (1995b:67). Social capital has captured the attention of social scientists and according to Wescott Dodd and Konzal 'sociologists define social connectedness or social capital as 'the network of norms, obligations, expectations and trust that forms among people who associate with one another and share common values' (2002: 105). In Warren et al.'s concise definition, social capital is understood as 'the set of resources that inhere in relationships of trust and cooperation between people' (2001:1). In short, according to Putman, social capital refers to 'our relations with one another' (1995a: 665). Cohen defined social capital in terms of 'networks, trust, norms, and interactions in which people engage daily to both survive and become enriched' (2001:267).

Coleman defines social capital as 'productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible' (1988:S98). In seeking to define social capital as a 'useful concept' Lappe and Du Bois propose that our understanding must embrace 'our capacity to go beyond the limits of constricted, individual choices' and embrace 'our capacity to come together to create options – to invent solutions that, as individuals acting alone are out of reach' (1997:2). Fundamentally, 'social capital recognises that relationships between neighbours, colleagues, friends, even casual acquaintances, have value for the individual and for society as a whole' (Gilchrist, 2004:4). Halpern too engages in the definition debate but ultimately states that 'the essence of the concept is simple' and it can really be understood as 'webs of association and shared understandings of how to behave' (2005:3).

Social capital is an evolving concept. Some theorists, including DeFilippis and Portes challenge the evolving interpretations of social capital, fearing that its meaning will become diluted to the extent that it will lose its definition. This concern has also been

raised and discussed in Chapter Two, 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility'. Furthermore, while these concerns have been noted a sound rationale has been presented for adoption of capital theory to inform this thesis. It is with some disquiet that Lappe and Du Bois note that social capital is typically measured 'by our citizens' participation in extracurricular activities' (1997:119). They fear that the proactive component of social capital, i.e. the mobilisation of resources, be they people or otherwise, could be lost. Therefore, they advocate that 'social capital must come to mean our collective intelligence – our capacity as a people to create the society we want' (ibid:2).

Social capital is a formative agent, 'captured through social relations' (Lin, 2001:19). Research strongly indicates that a rich social capital environment has very tangible outcomes at both individual and at community level. Indeed 'if social capital is a form of wealth that can be enjoyed by all' as MacGillivray and Walker contend, then 'it might have public policy implications' (2000:199). According to Putman, 'researchers in such fields as education, urban poverty, unemployment, the control of crime and drug abuse, and even health have discovered that successful outcomes are more likely in civilly engaged communities' (1995b:66). Sergiovanni contends that 'when students have access to social capital they find the support needed for learning. But when social capital is not available, they generate it for themselves by turning more and more to the student subculture for support' (1998:39). This sometimes culminates in 'the development of norms and codes of behaviour that work against what schools are trying to do', ultimately negatively affecting academic performance and social behaviour (ibid:39). It therefore behoves educators to investigate social capital not only as a mechanism to scaffold student outcomes, but also in terms of how the education system might contribute to its development.

To date a universally accepted definition of social capital evades us, however, an acknowledgement of social capital as potent force does not. While competing definitions emphasis particular aspects of the social capital construct, they also exhibit some cohesion. They acknowledge the central role of relationships, networking, trust, empowerment and mobilisation of resources as key features of social capital.

### 8.2.2 Measuring social capital

Focusing on the measurement of social capital offers an insight into how social capital is operationalised within a given context. Leyden's research into the relationship between the built environment and levels of social capital measured 'how well residents knew their neighbours, their political participation, their trust or faith in other people, and their social engagement' (2003:1548) as key measures of the prevalence of social capital. Temkin and Rohe explored the relationship between social capital and neighbourhood stability. They used two constitutive elements of social capital. Firstly they 'operationalise the concept of civic engagement' by using the construct of institutional infrastructure (1998:64). This includes the degree to which residents vote and volunteer, as well as the presence of neighbourhood organisations. Secondly, they used the socio-cultural milieu construct which is measured through a variety of neighbourhood activities including, 'visiting, helping, and borrowing items from one another' as well as measuring whether neighbours 'discuss neighborhood problems with other residents' (ibid:65). This measures 'affective sentiments felt by residents towards the neighbourhood along with any sense among residents that the neighbourhood is a special place within a larger metropolitan area' (ibid:65).

Field who carried out his research within a Northern Ireland context endeavoured to use the concept of social capital as an explanation for participation in life long learning opportunities. Drawing on what he terms key indicators Field concludes that Northern Ireland has by European standards a 'relatively high level of social capital' (1999:239). This is operationalised through strong collective ideologies, church membership, and comparatively stable family relations' (ibid:239).

Finally, Gittell et al. evaluated a demonstration programme designed to build both bonding and bridging capital. Bonding capital relates to bonds within the community and bridging capital is outwardly focused. The programmes were designed to '(1) strengthen the institutional infrastructure serving selected low-income communities and (2) lay the foundation for expanded activity in the future' (1998: 178). They concluded that:

social capital construction is difficult and slow, but it is possible, and that good program design and implementation can cultivate an environment in which it will grow more rapidly than it would if no one intervened (ibid:178).

However, disturbingly they also found that it is extremely difficult to build bridging capital ‘across lines of race and class’ (ibid: 178). Thus, social capital emerges not only as an entity to be observed and measured, but as a mobilising and transformative force to be further understood.

### **8.2.3 Operationalising social capital**

A greater understanding of this elusive concept can be gained from an understanding of how it is operationalised. According to Lin social capital is operationalised through the flow of information, by exerting influence, by recognising social credentials and by providing reinforcements (2001)

Social capital is a multi-dimensional entity, which ‘inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors’ (Coleman, 1988:S98). It ‘is about active, social choices, and concrete mechanisms that connect people’ (Briggs, 1997:5).

Briggs posits that ‘it is easiest to ‘see’ [social capital] in its individual guise, wherein it refers to a resource for individual action that is stored in human relationships’ (1998:178). Putman identified two forms of social capital, localized and generalised. The former is developed through clubs and local organisations all of which function to make the community work. The latter, materialised and generated at macro level between organisations (1993). According to Briggs social capital ‘works at various levels: family, neighbourhood, city, and society’ (1997:2). It is his contention that individuals use social capital for ‘at least two purposes’, firstly to ‘get by’ that is to gain social support and secondly to ‘get ahead’, understood as social leverage (ibid:2). He contends that we draw on social capital ‘when we get others, whether acquaintances, friends, or kin, to help us solve problems, seize opportunities, and accomplish other aims that matter to us’ (1998:178).

Social capital is activated at three levels. Firstly, in terms of bonding capital – conceptualised as ‘social bonds’ which are internal to the community. Secondly as ‘bridging capital’, which is horizontal in nature and outwardly focused. MacBeath et al. propose a third social capital dimension conceptualised as ‘linking social capital’, described as vertical in nature since it operates ‘within hierarchies of power and



influence' (2007:43). While acknowledging the value of bonding social capital particularly for 'disadvantaged individuals or groups', MacBeath et al. caution against romanticized notions stating that strong social bonds can also 'be an inhibiting factor, cutting people off from wider social contacts which may offer alternative perspectives' (ibid:43). Halpern provides a very comprehensive conceptual map which recognises three operational levels, micro, relating to family, meso relating to 'neighbourhood or workplace' and macro, relating to 'nation or race' (2005:27). His map explores how bonding, bridging and linking social capital are manifested at all three levels, and recognises networks, norms and sanctions as core social capital components.

#### **8.2.4 Positive and negative dimensions of social capital**

According to de Graff and Flap, social networks are 'important not only for finding jobs, but also for most other things people want in life - physical safety, good health, companionship, social esteem' (1988:453). The literature highlights positive outcomes in the areas of health and education and also in the regeneration of neighbourhoods (Stall and Stoecker 1998, Potapchuk et al. 1997, Field 199,2003). Indeed Potapchuk et al. see 'generalized social capital ... as absolutely necessary for the kind of collaboration essential for an effective civil society' (1997:6). According to Field, 'research findings also suggest that social capital may provide a counter-weight to economic and social disadvantage' (2003:47).

Field's work on Northern Ireland exposes the complex nature of social capital. In a divided community, such as Northern Ireland, he finds that access to social capital can be 'highly segregated and territorially limited' (1999:240). Field notes that a 'relatively high level of aggregate social capital also masks the extent to which specific individuals and groups are able to benefit from the resources that are created' (ibid:240). Ultimately, he posits that since 'not all social capital is equal: how far you can benefit from networks, trust and shared norms depends on your situation' (ibid:240). Furthermore, Field contends that the gender dimension of social capital has received little attention. Finally, Field grapples with the capacity of social capital to promote societal well-being, finding that 'generalising and institutionalising trust and fostering collective action, in a divided society high levels of social capital can help institutionalise and generalise mistrust, and inhibit collective action' (ibid:240).

Within the American context Putman recognised this negative dimension, when ‘groups like Michigan militia or youth gangs also embody a kind of social capital, for these networks and norms too, enable members to cooperate more effectively, albeit to the detriment of the wider community’ (1995a:665). Furthermore, Lopez and Stack expose the sinister capacity of networks to generate and maintain racial discrimination:

Networks to assist white mobility did so through racial discrimination and segregation, and the ‘wages of whiteness’ were linked to racial containment practices and the maintenance of racial order that concentrated wealth and whites in suburbs and poverty and minorities in cities (2001:37).

### **8.2.5 Social capital in a neighbourhood context**

Social capital activated through trust and networks has the capacity to create strong neighbourhood cohesion. On a very practical level, ‘local communities high in social capital are better able to realize common values and maintain the social controls that foster public safety’ (Sampson, 2001:95). Furthermore, Temkin and Rohe concluded that ‘social capital plays an important role in neighbourhood dynamics’ (1998:84). Profoundly, MacBeath et al. note that ‘those with extensive networks are more likely not only to be housed, healthy, hired and happier but also more willing and able to access and find success within the educational system’ (2007:43). Finally, according to Leyden, ‘empirical linkages have been found among social capital, the proper functioning of democracy, the prevention of crime, and enhanced economic development’ (2003:1546). Therefore, social capital emerges as a very precious resource, profiled by Warren et al. as ‘a collective asset, a feature of communities rather than the property of an individual (2001:1).

### **8.2.6 Trust as a core component of social capital**

Trust is ‘an essential component of all enduring relationships’ (Seligman, 1997:13), and a core component in the generation of social capital (Cohen, Covey, Dodd and Kozal, MacBeath, Putman, Warren et al.). Social capital ‘is operationalised in three key measures – trust, social membership and access to networks’ (MacBeath et al., 2007:42). According to Covey ‘Trust-or the lack of it- is at the root of success or failure in relationships, and in the bottom-line results of business, industry, education, and government’ (1992:31). He differentiates between trustworthiness at a personal

level which is ‘based on character’, and trust at the interpersonal level, conceptualised as the ‘emotional bank account between two people that enables them to have a win-win performance agreement’ (ibid:31). Putman differentiates between social trust that is ‘trust in other people’ and political trust, ‘trust in political authorities’, which he says are ‘empirically related and logically distinct’ (1995a:665). According to Putman social capital theory presumes that ‘the more we connect with other people the more we trust them, and vice versa ... and social trust and civil engagement are strongly correlated’ (ibid:665).

Stanton-Salazaar et al. explore the generation of trust and its attendant benefits in relation to youth peer networks, finding that mutual trust ‘assumes a key role in adolescent friendships’ (2005:386). Youth peer networks are a valuable mechanism through which ‘teenagers share and validate each other’s struggles to develop new identities and to assume new, more mature roles’ (ibid:380). Trust thus described is a core component of successful adolescent socialisation.

Trust has also been found to be a core component of successful educational change. Bryk and Schneider, subsequent to school reform measures in Chicago, explored the relationship between the nature of social exchanges and the capacity of the school to affect change. They believed that ‘the nature of these social exchanges and the local cultural features that shape them, condition a school’s capacity to improve’ (2002:5). Critically, in their quest to uncover the elements which facilitated successful outcomes, they found that ‘a broad base of trust across the school community lubricates much of the day to day functioning and is a critical resource as local leaders embark on ambitious improvement plans’ (ibid:5). They maintained that ‘social trust is especially important in the context of urban disadvantage, as they [teachers] seek to educate ‘other people’s children’ (ibid:5). Trust is a core component of a change process.

In contrast, distrust is harnessed through negative experiences with people and with institutions. Bryk and Schneider contend that ‘many of the social interactions that poor families have with local schools and other public institutions’ (2002:6) are characterised by distrust as a consequence of policy and societal changes. In agreement, Covey succinctly states ‘when trust is low communication processes deteriorate’ (1992: 302). In Chapter Six, ‘Journey of Hope: Transference, Transition

and Transformation' I explored the concept of hope as an enabling transformative agent. Hope is closely related to the area of trust. Since hope exists in mutuality as does trust, both are invested in transformative practice. The potential therefore for transformative outcomes is mediated to an extent through the presence of hope and trust.

### **8.2.7 Generating networks of social trust**

Networking is a key mechanism employed in the generation and maintenance of social capital. According to Cattell 'both informal and formal social networks are essential components of 'social capital', a resource produced when people cooperate for mutual benefit' (2001: 1502). Indeed, Lappe and du Bois. contend that 'humans are clearly social creatures who thrive best in rich associated networks' (1997:2). Maslow identifies the need to belong, but as we have seen group membership does not always yield socially positive outcomes. For example an individual may achieve a sense of belonging, identity, and purpose through membership of a criminal gang or by being a member of a racist organisation.

Social capital is developed when an institution metamorphoses into a 'community', or a neighbourhood moves from a collection of individuals and embraces a collective identity, a 'community'. Simply stated, Sergiovanni contends that 'schools develop social capital by becoming caring communities' (1998:38). According to Coleman social capital 'comes about through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action' (1988:S100). Concordantly, Gittell et al. recognise that 'the shift towards identifying with a group, sharing values, and developing trust is significant to the creation of social capital and civic action' (2000:123).

The creation and maintenance of networks are a core component in the generation of social capital. Networks are characterised by '*density* (the proportion of people who know each other) and *closure* (the preponderance of intra-versus inter- community links)' (Halpern, 2005:10). These networks are created when 'members acting together in association with common values and norms are able to build networks among themselves and with others, further increasing the strength of their social capital' (Gittell et al., 2000:123). According to Briggs, 'social capital is built up through repeated exchanges among people (or organisations) over time. It depends on

regular borrowing and lending of advice, favours, information and so on' (1997:3). Bryk and Schneider examine the school as a site of exchange and find that 'a complex web of social exchanges conditions the basic operations of schools' (2002:20). Subsequently, they explored the relationship between the 'school's capacity to improve' and 'social relationships at work in school communities'. In so doing they recognised both the 'mutual dependencies' and 'the asymmetric power relations, such as those between poor parents and the local school professionals' (ibid:20), which exist in school contexts. This resonates strongly with the discourse on partnership and home - school relationships in Chapter Two 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility'.

Stall et al. contend that networks must be organised, in that 'someone has to build strong enough relationships between people so they can support each other through long and sometimes dangerous struggles' (1998:730). This concept of having an active agent strategically develop and nurture relationships highlights the key role of leadership in developing and maintaining social capital. I am specifically concerned with the styles of leadership that facilitate the development of social capital within social organisations by mobilising people and resources to meet their personal needs and the needs of their communities. I explore this theme in section 8.3.

### **8.2.8 Social capital generation and depletion**

Social capital is a dynamic resource which develops 'from contacts in the church, neighbourhood or any social grouping with intergenerational closure' (Merz and Furman, 1997:4). Time must be invested to create and maintain social capital. According to a number of social capital theorists the lack of time investment in social capital generation has devastating outcomes. Leyden chronicles 'pressures of time and money on families, long commutes, television usage, and generational change' (2003:1546) as major factors in the decline of social capital. Putman decries the depletion of social capital within American society, and lays much of the blame with the extensive hours of television viewing which has become endemic within American culture. His research findings conclude that 'controlling for education, income, age, race, place of residence, work status, and gender, TV viewing is strongly and negatively related to social trust and group membership' (1995a:678). He is unequivocal in his conviction that 'each hour spent viewing television is associated

with less social trust and less group membership' (ibid:678). He believes television destroys social capital by time displacement, its effects on the outlooks of viewers, and its effects on children. Halpern also recognises that social capital can be depleted. Ultimately, we build social capital through the development of trust, which manifests itself in the development of networks. Activities in these networks at local level may include child-minding, shopping for a friend, or sharing of tools. However, this trust can be depleted when 'individuals who draw heavily on their social networks without putting much back tend to find themselves increasingly alone' (Halpern, 2005:30). The rules of engagement include reciprocity, and if on an individual, community, or national level, reciprocity is missing, trust will crumble and networks will not be sustainable.

At an institutional and governmental level, social capital may be depleted by poor planning. Stanton-Salazar is scandalized by planners who ghettoise people into 'segregated and resource-poor ecologies' (2005:380). Cohen, recognising that poor communities may have bonding capital but 'lack the intervening institutions to convert their trust, networks and norms of reciprocity into political power', advocates that we become 'more specific in our demands for infrastructure in these communities' (2001:275), in other words, they may lack bridging capital. Disturbingly Cohen contends that, 'government policies and programmes meant to service poor communities sometimes, possibly unintentionally, destroy social capital' (ibid:275). Ultimately, social capital is a resource which can be fostered and grown, or indeed depleted through ignorance, lack of planning, or individual disengagement from social networks.

### **8.2.9 Social capital and poverty**

I am particularly interested in how social capital can be nurtured in low-income areas, and thus I will explore the relationship between poverty and social capital. The absence of financial capital does not denote the absence of social capital. Indeed the bonding dimension of social capital is often rich in communities where people support and care for each other. Strong kinship networks help to keep children safe within high-risk communities. Indeed Seaman et al. found that that parents' necessity to work outside the home was facilitated by strong kinship bonds which 'depended on the reciprocity of all parties to keep it going' (2005:34). Similarly, Rabrenovic with

reference to Susser's work, acknowledged that 'for people living in poverty, support networks and sharing resources are means of economic survival', a mechanism to 'resist economic and political marginality' (1995:79). Warren et al. stress that 'the main problem in poor communities may not be a relative deficit in social capital, but that their social assets have greater obstacles to overcome, and are consequently under assault' (2001:4). Stanton-Salazar concluded that 'those in poor areas have neither the resources nor the capacity to transform the poverty and racial isolation of our inner cities' (2005:412). These communities may be more deplete in both bridging and linking social capital, which politicise and manipulate resources across contexts. I agree that communities may be resource/capital poor thus creating very challenging contexts for change to take place. However, I am totally convinced that the only way to create sustainable change is through recognising the latent capacity for transformation within the community, thus I embrace Freire's ideology of the oppressed as agents of change.

#### **8.2.10 Social capital and education**

The capacity of any school to engage in social capital development is mediated through a complex range of variables. Indeed the school has the potential to construct or destruct social capital resources. Halpern contends that education 'has a special relationship with social capital in that it is viewed by some as a key tool in the creation of social capital' (2005:143). Attention to this role seems all the more crucial when he contends that 'deficits in social capital may play a role in educational underperformance of many disadvantaged young people' (ibid:151). According to Stanton-Salazar, the school setting holds the largely untapped potential to build social capital among its youth, by providing a 'facilitating institutional context' in which youth can 'get to know and learn to trust one another' (2005:412). This can be achieved by providing spaces in which young people could meet and partake in 'systematic training for the task of constructing social systems of support, including the cultivation of positive peer relationships' (ibid:409). Noguera sees an investment in schools as an investment in social capital, particularly so for poor children for whom 'urban schools are increasingly the most reliable source of stability and social support (2001:197). MacBeath et al. also address the position of schools in relation to social capital, stating that 'the same concepts of bonding, bridging and vertical linking apply powerfully within a school context' (2007:44).

Noguera contends that schools can facilitate positive or negative social capital as a function of how they operate. He posits that ‘schools where academic failure is high and low achievement is accepted as the norm and schools that isolate themselves from the neighbourhoods they serve because they perceive the residents as ‘threatening’ tend to undermine the social capital of the community’ (2001:193). On the other hand, he believes that ‘effective urban schools ... can further the development of social capital within poor communities because they are perceived as sources of opportunity and support, primarily because they provide students with the means to improve their lives’ (ibid: 193). The type of social capital is dependent on the ‘nature of the relationship between the school-and the individuals who work there-and the community, including parents of the children enrolled’ (ibid:193). If the connections are ‘weak or characterised by fear and distrust it is more likely that the school will serve as a source of negative social capital’ (ibid:193). However, the school can also act as a formative agent, and ‘when schools have formed a genuine partnership based on respect and a shared sense of responsibility, positive forms of social capital can be generated’ (ibid:193). Noguera concludes that the:

goal must be to transform urban schools into sources of social stability and support for families and children by developing their potential to serve as sources of intra-community integration and to provide resources for extra-community linkages’ (ibid:197).

Stanton-Salazar et al. address the potential of the school to develop peer social capital, and decry the fact that schools often provide ‘virtually no systematic training for the task of constructing social systems of support, including the cultivation of positive peer relationships’ (2005:409). Their research revealed that ‘the formation of supportive relationships requires a facilitating institutional context’ (ibid:412). Schools hold the potential to act as generators and guardians of social capital. Indeed, according to Barbour et al. ‘schools are best situated to assess the social settings of an area, make plans for remediation, and begin the process of drawing institutions together for the betterment of children’ (1997:263).

In order to effectively generate and nurture social capital schools must be resourced, led, and facilitated to do so. Targeted and strategic investment in schools with due attention to the development of networking and the development of trust equates to investment in social capital development.



### 8.3 Leadership

In section 8.2.7 I introduced the theory that the nature of leadership has a major role to play in the generation and maintenance of social capital. Indeed my literature review revealed that the theory of leadership practice is a highly contested field. If ‘leadership is about the creating and nurturing of an environment in which people give of their best’ (INTO, 1996:20) it is important to examine how that leadership is both conceptualised and operationalised. I have already discussed the role of the Principal in terms of his/her leadership style in section 2.5.2.7. Broadly speaking, the INTO recognise two categories of leadership. A traditional managerial model and a consultative model ‘which emphasises personal and professional relationships in schools with a view to developing a collective spirit’ (ibid: 52). Hargreaves and Fink advocate for sustainable leadership, which they contend is not necessarily a component of other leadership styles. They acknowledge that charismatic leaders, ‘may lift their schools to impressive heights’, but unfortunately when they move on to new challenges ‘they are often tempted to take their best people with them, placing all they have previously achieved in jeopardy’ (2006:2). Likewise, heroic leaders ‘may achieve great things through investing vast amounts of their time and energy’, it is not sustainable since ‘many of these leaders and the people who work for them ultimately burn out’ (ibid:2). Sergiovanni also problematizes leadership styles, specifically in relation to the school context. He highlights the limitations of bureaucratic, visionary, and entrepreneurial leadership, which he notes are the most frequently invoked by policy makers and school leaders (1998:37). He subsequently proposes pedagogical leadership as a means of building ‘social and academic capital for students, and intellectual and professional capital for teachers’ (ibid: 38).

As discussed in section 2.5.2.7 the style of leadership adopted by the Principal plays a key role in school success. Within the school context leadership practice is mediated through the leadership style of the Principal. Fullan contends that while ‘the Principal is the nerve centre of school improvement’ (2006:1). He posits that it is not the ‘individual leaders who make for success but rather the leaders who establish a critical mass of leadership’ (ibid:6). Spillane developed the concept of distributed leadership which ‘moves beyond the Superman and Wonder woman view of leadership. It is about more than accounting for all the leaders in a school and counting up their various actions to arrive at some more comprehensive account of

leadership' (2006:3). He conceptualises distributed leadership as the 'product of the joint interactions of school *leaders, followers*, and aspect of their *situation* such as tools and routines' (ibid:3). His model addresses the 'collective interactions among leaders, and followers, and their situation' (ibid:4).

Many of the above theorists locate leadership within institutional contexts. These leaders, complete with academic qualifications, fill positions with salaries, benefits, and status. I am, however, keenly interested in exploring the concept of leadership within low-income communities and specifically in relation to women's leadership styles. And indeed I wonder if leaders working within institutional settings have anything to learn from the matriarchal mode of leadership style, developmental leadership, which I will now describe. My contention is that schools located in communities would benefit enormously from embracing and integrating this mode of leadership. St Lelia's, the host school certainly did.

### **8.3.1 Making a case for an alternative understanding of leadership**

While a vast body of literature addresses models of leadership practice, there is little critique of traditional matriarchal and patriarchal styles as an inherited and inherent constituent of leadership. There is still less critique of the influence of race, or class on how leadership is operationalised. I will now explore leadership, as it is manifested predominantly throughout community contexts. I do so since being female, and indeed feminist, I am conscious of the constraints experienced by women leaders. Most importantly, leadership in KCP and the host school was predominantly female. All members of the committee were female, most tutors were female, and most teachers were female and therefore the exploration of female leadership styles is pertinent to this case study. This is not unique as, according to Witte Garland, 'the leadership and ranks of community groups are predominantly women' (1988:xi).

Women have always worked in and for community. Dominelli contends that 'since time immemorial, women have worked in the community, stitching the threads of everyday life together. Most of the time this work goes on unnoticed, except when it is not done or is the subject of complaint' (1995:133). According to Field Belenky et al. women community leaders are often invisible (1997:4), and this is so because their form of leadership runs 'counter to the conventional conceptions of both women and

public leaders' (ibid:4). Brodtkin Sacks in her work on gender and grassroots leadership, exposed different norms of leadership practice for women and men. She concluded that 'to recognize this [women's] structure of leadership, and to expand the term *leadership* to encompass it is to make the invisible visible' (1988:93). With reference to Robnett, Stall and Stoecker contend that 'women-centered organising defines human nature from an ethic of care' (1998:739). Leadership is activated not from 'a morality of individual morality' but from 'a collectivist orientation' (ibid:739). When 'these strong powerful women remain largely invisible, their words unheard' (Field Belenky: 1997:4) we do not learn from them, and tragically we fail to acknowledge their contribution to society.

### **8.3.2 Leadership within the dichotomy of public and private worlds**

Unconventionally, this leadership style 'bypasses a whole range of dualistic notions that ordinarily shape the ways most people in our culture construe the world' (Field Belenky et al. 1997:16). This tradition blurs the boundaries between public and private life and 'holds that all aspects of social life should be permeated with the values of home associated with nurturing the development of human beings' (ibid:16). Helgeson describes women's leadership as ecological in that women leaders tend to think 'in terms of the larger group' (1990:49). While Belenky et al. among others have referred to the invisibility of women, it is not as if women have been confined to the private environs of the home, rather that their work has not received the same attention as traditional male leadership, and indeed that the presumptions made around leadership style which has informed research practice, have not extended into the realm of community practice to the same degree as investigations within institutional contexts. Ackelberg challenges the conventional view of 'women as passive members of the polity who live their lives in a private sphere protected (in the case of middle- or upper-class women) or isolated (in the case of working-class women) from the mainstream of "public" life and politics' (1988:297). Indeed, she contends that 'women have been, and continue to be, centrally involved in resistance movements in many workplaces and neighbourhoods' (ibid:297). Feminist theorists challenge the dichotomy of public/private spheres. Ackelsberg contends that in order to run the home women, of necessity, negotiate with institutions in the public sphere, whatever class they belong to. It is increasingly acknowledged that women have played a significant role in major social battles to

improve services in education, health, equality, and justice. We need to also pay attention to how they achieved this, the roles they played, and how those roles complemented, or not, the traditional roles of leadership.

### **8.3.3 Embracing developmentally focused leadership**

Field Belenky et al. critique developmentally focused leadership, which they conceive of as ‘a leadership tradition rooted in maternal practice and maternal thinking [which] has gone unnamed’ (1997:293). The leaders encountered by Field Belenky et al.:

had developed themselves as public leaders by extending and elaborating women’s traditional roles and relational styles to an unusual degree. They were like mothers who had developed the most elaborate philosophy and set of practices for bringing people unequal in terms of power, status, and abilities, into relations of full equality. The inequality that mothers address, however, typically reflects the immaturity of the child, whereas the inequality that these community organizations confront arises from prejudice and discrimination as well as from immaturity’ (ibid:11).

This they believe contrasts sharply with ‘models of leadership organized around paternal metaphors and practices’ which ‘have been meticulously described throughout all of recorded history’ (ibid:293). They contrast this maternal mode of leadership with its patriarchal counterpart in which ‘patriarchs see themselves as the ‘head’ of their families; they ‘rule over’, not ‘raise up’ (ibid:17).

Within the developmental leadership tradition individual growth is understood in the context of community growth. This tradition is guided by an inclusive philosophy which rejects the concept of ‘other’ and unconditionally embraces all members of the human family.

Developmentally focused leadership is about people finding voice, claiming their strength, realising their ability to solve problems, and ‘becoming more aware of the collaborative nature of the construction of knowledge’ (Field Belenky et al. 1997:7). This happens within a dialogical, intergenerational context in which ‘people are drawn out and empowered’, and ‘likely to draw out and empower others, who in turn will reach out to others. If all goes well the chain might remain unbroken for many generations to come’ (ibid:7). Field Belenky et al. ‘came to see that women of all

colours become community leaders who sponsor the development of the most marginalised and vulnerable members of the community' (ibid:13). As their study progressed they realised that 'there was a tradition to be studied even when the tradition had no name'. Field Belenky et al. called their study sites 'public homeplaces' since the leaders focused on 'nurturing the development of people, families, and communities' (ibid:13). Rabrenovic echoes Field Belenky et al.'s philosophical stance that by 'framing their concerns in terms of the needs and rights of women, men, and children, women are able to make a connection between their gender-based demands and their family and community issues' (1995:78). She studied families trapped in violent neighbourhoods by poverty and found that women had 'taken action to stop violence against themselves and their children; ensure enough resources to feed, clothe, and house their children; and gain the right to be heard in the political arena' (ibid:77). Thus the 'entire community becomes the constituency of women-led organizations and movements', echoing Field Belenky et al.'s conceptualisation of public homeplaces. Indeed Stall and Stoecker noted that women's activism is 'often a response to the needs of their own children and of other children in the community' (Gilkes, 1980) (1998:739).

In her research on the community work of women in low-income urban neighbourhoods, Naples introduces Collins' concept of community othermothers, 'who help build community institutions and fight for the welfare of their neighbours' (1992:443). Dissatisfied with traditional conceptualisations of both mothering and engagement in community work, Naples coined the term 'activist mothering', as a means of describing 'the complex ways in which the African-American and Latina community workers made sense of their own activities' (ibid:446). Yet again, the artificial fragmentation of public and private lives comes to the fore. Naples contends that 'traditional academic practices fragment social life and falsely separate paid work from social reproduction, activism from mothering, and family from community' (ibid:446). Activist mothering is operationalised through 'nurturing work for those outside one's kinship group', and 'encompasses a broad definition of actual mothering practices' (ibid:448). Developmental leadership practice is articulated through caring practice in these public homeplaces.

According to Field Belenky et al. these invisible leaders are 'intensely interested in the development of each individual, in the group as a whole, and of a more

democratic society' (1997:14). They want to know people individually, articulate the needs of the group, build on people's strengths, and indeed 'look for the strengths in people's culture as a building foundation for the whole community' (ibid:14). These leaders empathise, ask questions, and listen intensely. Payne, in his work, 'Ella Baker and Social Change', was deeply influenced by Ella's leadership philosophy. He believed that 'freedom requires that people be able to analyse their own social position and understand their collective ability to do something about it without relying on leaders', quoting Baker herself as his inspiration, 'strong people don't need strong leaders' (Payne, 1989:893). This philosophy, in which power is located in the 'oppressed' echoes Friere's contention that 'it is essential for the oppressed to realise that when they accept the struggle for humanisation, they also accept, from that moment, their total responsibility for the struggle' (Freire, 1972:43). Freire speaks of a 'humanising pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed' (ibid:44).

So how can these revolutionary style leaders be understood within our modern urban context? Field Belenky et al. call these types of leaders 'connected leader' since they open themselves so fully to others (1997:14). These kinds of leaders are not just voluntary leaders within community contexts. These connected leaders also create 'public homeplaces' in schools, research collaborations, interest groups and in universities. They create places where 'every voice is being heard, where the group's action projects are designed to address the members' most driving questions and concerns and where all are supported to be the best they know how to be' (Field Belenky et al. 1997:15). In fact, Field Belenky et al. link the success of the civil rights movement and the women's movement to the development of 'public homeplaces' across America in local communities, which linked to national and international networks. Thus confirming Ackelberg's earlier thesis of women's active engagement in the public world.

Gittell et al.'s research explored links between the generation of social capital and women's community activism. They found that 'established social scientific constructs do not fully capture the expressions of women's leadership' (2000:127) which they encountered. The styles of leadership they encountered did not fit with Weber's theory of leadership, which subdivides leadership practice into patriarchal authority and charismatic authority. While they encountered charismatic leaders in

their research, these leaders ‘did not encourage others to divest their power of decision making in them’ (2000:127). And, while they also encountered women who were ‘matriarchal in their leadership’, emphasising their age and experience in the community and referring to their organisation as a family, these women perceived of themselves as ‘resource persons to the community’ (ibid:128). Kaplan, in her research into women activists in grassroots movements, drew very similar conclusions to the preceding researchers. She found that the women she researched were ‘reclaiming human rights on their own terms, redefining humanity and making demands for social and economic support necessary to sustain it’ (1997:4). These women generated vast amounts of social capital, ‘with their strong personalities, abilities to pitch in, and high morale, [they] gather together people with different backgrounds, areas of expertise, and status, helping create egalitarian movements’ (ibid:4). The leadership role taken by the grassroots activists was about enhancing ‘the ability of the group to reach a higher moral plane’, about helping the ‘community to come together’ and not about ‘standing out herself’ (ibid:4). The leader in this instance assumes a facilitative nurturing role. This model of leadership ‘views the community as an extension of the private sphere ... it thus emphasises relationship building, coactive power, indigenous organizers, and informal organizational structures (Stall and Stoecker, 1998:748).

#### **8.3.4 Natural allies: Developmental leadership and social capital**

It is my contention that developmental leadership is most suited to the development of social capital. According to Field Belenky the organisational chart of the public homeplaces leaders resembles a web or a net (1997:18). This leader is sometimes in the centre of the circle, but more often on the margins, zig zagging between people and other organizations. Helgesen also uses a similar metaphor in her description of women’s leadership styles, and states while doing her research she ‘became aware that the women, when describing their roles in their organizations, usually referred to themselves as being in the middle of things. Not at the top, but in the centre; not reaching down, but reaching out’ (1990:45). This zigzagging is easily interpreted as networking, a core constituent of social capital generation and activation. The developmental leadership model has much in common with the sustainable leadership, distributed leadership and indeed charismatic leadership. However, the developmental leader works strategically to enhance community through building on the strengths of individuals, and mobilising resources within and beyond the

community. Purdue, in his examination of neighbourhood governance recognises informal networking structures typical of community activism and contrasts them to the ‘defined institutions of power and legitimacy of a political party’ (2001:2214). In these community settings ‘community leaders are engaged in accumulating ‘internal’ social capital embodied in their accountability to their grassroots following and ‘external’ social capital in their access to wider elite networks through partnership (ibid:2214). These leaders are of the community, they feel the pain, are brave enough to dream, and angry and empowered enough to act. While they may be employed in their capacity as leaders, their motivation comes from a personal commitment to enact change.

#### **8.4 Summary**

I have defined social capital has been defined as a mobilising and potent force, which, when used for wholesome reasons, builds personal, community, and indeed society’s capacity to function effectively. Social capital is activated through networking mediated through trust at individual and group level. Leadership is crucial to the development of social capital. Connections are made within and cross contexts, indeed the concept of social capital is by its very nature ecologically embedded.

#### **8.5 What made Kileely Community Project work?**

I asked all my participants why they thought KCP worked, why it still existed after so many years, and factors they believed contributed to its success. I also asked them what advice they would give to a school wishing to set up a similar project. These questions were designed to excavate the factors that made KCP work. While the social capital framework presented above goes a long way to explain the factors that contributed to the success of KCP, there are a number of discrete factors which I wish to highlight before proceeding to implement the social capital framework. I will acknowledge the availability, location and design of the school building, the multi-service nature of KCP, the intergenerational involvement within families and the key role respectful relationships played in ensuring the survival, success, and sustainability of KCP.



### **8.5.1 The host school**

The host school was both capable and willing of conceiving of itself as a community resource. The location, design, availability, ethos and culture of the host school impacted greatly on the growth and development of KCP. The school and its location are described in Chapter Five, 'Area Profile'. The Board of Management, teachers and specifically the school Principals welcomed KCP and embraced it as part of the service the school offered to the community. The school was available for use by KCP during and after school hours. Members of KCP committee took responsibility for opening and locking the building outside school hours, ensuring that all rooms were left in the condition in which they were found, that lights were turned off, and that the school and KCP equipment was respected. Furthermore, as classrooms became available due to decreasing school numbers, additional classrooms were converted for use by KCP, for example, the playroom was installed for use by the 'Three O'Clock School' and children within the school. Another classroom was converted into the sitting room for use by the SPACE project, adult education classes, and the school itself. Any resources accumulated by either the school or KCP were readily shared.

The host school welcomed the presence of KCP from the start. The school responded to the growth and development of KCP through an ever increasing culture of partnership. Many changes were made during the twenty years span covered by this research, for example, initially teachers and parents and children did not call each other by their first names. This changed through the symbiotic cultural exchange between the school and KCP. The shared ethos of care and respect which permeated across all activities is one of the core reasons the project was successful. This shared ethos evolved through pro-active partnership and developmental leadership practice, both of which will be discussed later in this chapter.

My research uncovered a very interesting reason to explain why KCP worked well within a school environment. As previously stated, an appreciation of the nature of relationships is key to understanding the impact of KCP. People develop relationships as they interact. The kitchen was a key site of interaction. However, the school corridor also emerged as a key site of interaction. As parents waited to collect their children they interacted with each other. When children left their classrooms to travel

to toilets, the yard, or to other classrooms, they met a variety of adults who all greeted them and acknowledged their presence. Photographs of First Communion groups and school events as well as children's art work adorn the corridor walls. These displays are observed by adult learners, parents collecting children and children themselves, and often form a topic of conversation within families. As parents travel down the length of the corridor to bring their children to the pre-school they greet and are greeted by all members of staff. Teachers know children and parents long before their children attend Junior infants.

### **8.5.2 Multi-service facility**

St. Lelia's school evolved to become a multi-service site. It housed a school, pre-school, crèche, adult education classes, the SPACE project and an after school club, called the 'Three O'Clock School' as well as Saturday morning art classes. This multi-service approach to learning provision built expectations, aspirations, and enhanced communication. Having adult education classes located in the school meant that parents attending classes had informal opportunities to meet with teachers, and teachers in turn had easy and regular access to meet with parents. If difficulties or more often an occasion to celebrate a child's achievement arose, parents and teachers had easy access to each other. Young mothers in the SPACE project had access to a crèche so that they could explore their own learning needs in a safe environment. Simply setting up the SPACE project would not have worked without the crèche facility. Many of these children progressed from the crèche, to the pre-school and from the pre-school to junior infants, creating natural and easy transitions for parents and for children. In response to my question of how well the 'school' functioned one young mother described this multi-service school as follows:

Everything works very well down there. It is unbelievable. The crèche, the pre-school, the children's education and the adults education. It all ties in together. It works well because people have the right attitudes. When you go in there is nobody saying you shouldn't do this or you shouldn't do that. You can be yourself. They accept you for what you are and they don't condemn you or look down their nose at you.

### **8.5.3 Intergenerational family involvement**

Another reason that KCP proved to be dynamic and sustainable was because of intergenerational family involvement. As the school functioned as a multi-service building in many instances members of the same family were attending classes,

volunteering, or working as members of the committee. Using the school in this way enabled communication within families, as parents attending classes noticed their children's work displayed on the walls, or as children saw their parents attend adult education classes, only too delighted to visit them at break time on a cookery morning and share the spoils. Family members shared a common experience, that of using the school as a learning centre. Children witnessed adults attending classes and internalised the message that learning is a lifelong process. They also came to experience the care of adults in community through specific involvement in the 'Three O'Clock School' and more generally through casually meeting adults in the school in the course of the school day.

#### **8.5.4 Continuity of personnel**

Another key reason KCP functioned effectively was because of the 'continuity of personnel, be they teachers, tutors or leaders' (Statutory agency participant no. 1). This belief is echoed by many of the research participants. Many of the tutors have been involved for a long number of years. Sometimes tutors worked in both the adult and child aspects of the project. Tutors have also attended as learners, and have served as members of the Board of Management of the school. KCP committee members have been involved in running the project for most of its lifespan. They have built up trusting relationships with members of the community, and their dedication and commitment over time is a major reason KCP is so successful.

#### **8.5.5 Respect as a core component in the success, survival and sustainability of Kileely Community Project**

I could not write this thesis without acknowledging the key role respectful relationships and respectful practice played in ensuring the survival, success, and sustainability of KCP. Indeed, if I were asked to sum up why KCP worked in one word, I would use the word respect. While respect is closely aligned to trust, it was such an overwhelmingly recurring factor in the research findings that it deserves specific mention. Respect permeated all aspects of KCP. Let me explain further. I will begin by exploring the respectful use of the limited resources in the school.

### **8.5.5.1 Respect for resources**

The kitchen functioned as an adult education room and as a staff room and as a tea-room for all workers in the school. This room was used continually from early morning, for adult classes, tea breaks, meetings etc. Successful sharing of this room was dependent on each group respecting the room by cleaning up after their activities as well as a consciousness around the time restrictions, and filling the kettle for the next round of tea breaks. During the KCP committee focus group I asked them what advice they would give to another school interested in setting up a project similar to KCP. They identified respect as a core element, operationalised through a consciousness of the needs of all workers and learners using the school:

Voice 1: They will have to have a school where the teachers are amenable to it because I do realise we use this school so much. If anyone goes outside the norm we are wrecked [do not finish using the room when they are scheduled to]. There are two tea breaks for workers as well as breaks for teachers  
Voice 2: You're finished.  
Voice 1 Because we are all aware ...  
Voice 3: That someone needs the room for this particular time there is someone else waiting  
Voice 1 But that's respect as well. Isn't it?  
Voice 2: Tis tis  
Voice 1: The breaks are unbelievable  
Voice 3: It is probably one of the busiest schools in Limerick  
Voice 4: We always made sure kettle was filled. It's only small little things. But its respect for people  
Voice 3: When they come  
Voice 1: It's like a house. Here it's like a family  
Voice 4: Exactly.  
Voice 1: And it is great cos, [teacher] will come in here she is the Principal and she wouldn't be like the Principals in other schools or somewhere else. It's just like – 'Will ye get out of it our that. It is like a family. I have to say that cos everybody does care.

### **8.5.5.2 Respect for participant's knowledge**

Respect was manifested through pedagogical practice within the adult classes, the 'Three O'Clock School' and the SPACE project. The programmes in all aspects of KCP were needs driven, and acknowledged the prior learning of participants. The relationships between tutors and participants were based on genuine concern and respect. Tutors saw themselves as facilitators of learning, respected their student's prior learning, and also saw themselves as active learners. Respect permeated the evolving relationships between adult learners. They grew to claim their rights as learners and as co-learners.

In the ‘Three O’Clock School’, children and adults worked to optimise learning in a caring nurturing environment. Tutors, parents, and children negotiated the programme content, reflected on its success, and respected the experiences and skills each brought to the learning table.

### **8.5.5.3 Respect for persons**

The research participants spoke passionately of how the ethos of respect for the dignity of each person was manifested through communication on a first name basis, lack of hierarchical structures, and shared decision making processes. Within the school and within KCP children, teachers, tutors, parents, adult learners, FÁS CE workers, SNAs, and adult learners all communicated on a first name basis. You might wonder why simply calling a person by their first name had such an enormous impact. The answer lies not in deed but the attitude inherent in it. Through KCP and the host school members of a ‘professional community’, i.e. tutors and teachers communicated with local people on a first name basis. My research participants revealed that ‘working class people’ do not often experience such ease of communication with ‘professionals’, and there were many instances of parents sharing negative experiences with services including schools.

### **8.5.6 Horizontal structures**

Lack of hierarchical structure was repeatedly named as a contributory factor to the survival, success and sustainability of KCP and indeed of the school itself. The boundary between the school as a separate entity and KCP had blurred as the school underwent regeneration and as KCP developed. Interview participants showed a high degree of familiarity with the school staff, ancillary staff, and KCP staff. What was most interesting is that the ethos of care and respect they described permeated all aspects of services located in the school building. From very early in the interviewing process my participants described the working and learning ethos as non-hierarchical. I realised this would be of little significance if the only participants who were proposing this were in positions of leadership such as teachers or tutors with permanent job status. I was therefore alert to this finding when interviewing participants who might be perceived as less powerful such as participants who worked on the FÁS CE scheme, caretakers or SNAs. Interestingly, the ethos of

respect operating among adults seemed to filter into the attitudes of children. The following interview extracts from a variety of different participants shows the uniformity of beliefs around the lack of hierarchical relations. A lack of hierarchical relations does not denote a lack of leadership, quite the opposite as I will prove later in this chapter:

There is no tier system. Everyone gets on with everybody else and there is definitely a very good relationship between everybody working in the school or people coming into the school. A warm friendly caring atmosphere and of course that leads to a happy learning environment and a happy working environment for teachers children members of the community.

(Teacher number 2)

There is no class distinction here anyway. Some people think they are a step above other people when they have money you know. You might have more than them yourself ... A lot of it is false as well Ann. Anyway a lot of it is false. They would walk on top of it if they got away with it. Make little of people. They try to. I see that in a lot of places. You wouldn't here do you know what I mean ... in some places now teachers are a bit ... you are a FÁS worker and that's it. You know what I mean. Its not like that here at all. Sometimes if you are only a FÁS worker they kinda look down on you. 'Sure they are only a FÁS worker'. But here everyone is kinda classed the same.

(Ancillary staff no. 3)

The children don't seem to have any barriers with any of the adults here. They treat everyone the same. They do what you tell them regardless of who you are, that's what I think now. Whether you are a teacher, helper. They just have respect for other people even though they are on first name terms like.

(Ancillary staff no. 4)

### **8.5.7 Acknowledgement and fulfilment of learning aspirations**

In Chapter Two, 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility', I address the issue of parental and children's aspirations. The literature review attested to the prevalence of high aspirations despite very challenging circumstances. The difference emerges not in the levels or prevalence of aspirations but in the resources to activate them. My research confirms the strong presence of high aspirations among my research participants. Some of my participants spoke of their sense of frustration and failure within the school system, contrasting it sharply with their sense of achievement within KCP. Many of the participants were early school leavers, who left the system to find work. Later in life they felt the loss of an education, and hunger to continue to learn. KCP worked because it went some way to addressing unmet aspirations for adults and children, and addressed and affirmed

aspirations among and between adults and children. Adults related the sense of joy at learning different skills, and indeed the sense of wonder at their own achievements. The former 'Three O'Clock School' participants clearly articulated how KCP enabled them to develop academic, social and personal skills, all of which helped them to be happier people. The SPACE participants attested to the life enhancing experiences they had in an atmosphere of trust and respect. The adult learners found a means of to address their own aspirations and a mechanism to operationalise their aspirations for their children.

### **8.5.8 Pedagogy and programme**

The method in which people were taught and the content of the programmes were a key factor in making KCP work effectively. Space does not permit me to explore this issue to the extent I would wish. However the respectful, interactive learning environments of the 'Three O'Clock School', adult education classes and the SPACE project contributed significantly to ensuring the project was a success. KCP developed its programmes from a needs-led perspective, in so far as resources permitted. Decisions about what classes to run for adults, and the nature of the programme within SPACE and the 'Three O'Clock School' were all negotiated between tutors and learners. An informal learning atmosphere permeated all classes. I will share with you now my favourite story from my years of work in the 'Three O'Clock School'. I think this showcases the typical relationship between tutors and learners. It is also the greatest compliment I have ever received in my working life.

One afternoon as the 'Three O'Clock School' was in full swing in the kitchen, parents and tutors were engaged in a variety of activities with small groups of children. It was noisy and busy as usual. I was working with a group of three children aged about eight at the time. We were doing some reading activities. One of the boys, lets call him Mark, turned to me and said, 'Ann there was a great film on last night, it was very funny'. As I did not have a television in my home at the time, a topic the children really enjoyed debating, I asked him to tell me about the film. 'It was so funny Ann' he said, 'there was a woman in it and she was a mammy and she wanted to go out to work as well'. Of course, I asked him why that was funny explaining that I too was a mammy and I went out to work. He looked at me in disbelief and said, 'Do you work Ann?' I replied 'I do love'. Then came the gem which I have carried

with me all these years. He simply opened his eyes widely and said ‘where’? For over twenty year I have carried that story in my heart, that a young child with reading difficulties did not realise that I was actually working with him. The engagement seemed so natural, and indeed it was. I think the ‘Three O’Clock School’ was a indeed a ‘public homeplace’.

### **8.5.9 Social capital: Trust and networks**

KCP worked because it developed social capital. Social capital is built through networking and facilitated through trust relationships. The nature of relationships between all stakeholders has been explored in Chapter Seven, ‘Did Kileely Community Project Make a Difference?’ These networks do not simply evolved. They are grown and nurtured and guided through effective leadership. In this section I will focus on the extent to which trust was developed and networks formed. The previous section on respect is pertinent to this discussion.

In KCP, social capital was generated through the social networks, formed through the provision of educational opportunities for adults and young people. A variety of adult morning and evening classes offered opportunities to study subjects such as cookery, literacy, and keep fit. However, while subject specific learning was certainly going on, the classes provided the seed bed for the development of social networks which promoted a sense of solidarity, hope, empowerment, and agency. Similarly, in the ‘Three O’Clock School’, young people engaged in academic, social and creative learning opportunities, while at the same time bonding as families and as friends. Networks were formed and trust nurtured. Where previously people had known each other to say hello, they now formed ‘intimate friendships’. Participants repeatedly spoke of the value of sharing problems. This facilitated the breakdown of isolation, where people realised ‘they were not the only ones’ with difficulties. It also allowed other members of the community to be ‘part of the solution’. By offering support and advice, people realised they had a valuable resource to share with their friends and neighbours.

Trusting relationships have a number of dimensions. On a personal level, trust has a chronological dimension, the longer you know someone, the more you are likely to trust them, or not. Trust has a reciprocal quality also.



One of the tutors described the relationship between the adult learners and the teachers and ‘workers’ in the school. The workers refers to personnel working on the FÁS CE scheme and to the Special Needs Assistants (SNA) workers as well as to the caretaker. It is noteworthy how all personnel working in the school are included in a treat. Also as the kitchen functions as an adult education centre as well as a staff room, and it is a very small room, adult learners and tutors are conscious of providing space for the teachers and ‘worker’ to have their break. There is no sense here of being unwelcome or in the way, just a sense that space and time place constraints which need to be mutually respected:

The relationship between the adult classes and the school is very very good, cos non of the teachers will inconvenience the classes in any way ... they won't ever ... and you know ... we know their time and make a point of being gone cos they need to discuss what has gone on in the morning for them ... we leave the kettles boiled ... we make scones or have a bit of apple tart there for workers and the teachers.

KCP built bonding capital, manifested through strong supportive relationships among and between target and non-target individuals. People experienced support in their personal and learning lives. It also built bridging social capital in that groups of learners accessed educational opportunities across the city. Members of the SPACE project accessed learning opportunities in other local community centres. Some members of this group also returned to sit state exams, accessing formal learning opportunities further afield. A group of adult learners, accessed learning opportunities in other local community facilities. As with the SPACE participants, they had gained the confidence and solidarity to move beyond their immediate learning environment and access opportunities in other areas.

#### **8.5.10 Social capital: Leadership for empowerment**

In section 8.3 above I explored models of leadership and declared my belief that social capital can be generated through developmental leadership. Indeed I believe strongly that developmental leadership practice was the engine which powered the survival, success, and sustainability of KCP. Developmental leadership was embraced across learning contexts by leaders with a passionate belief that change was not only necessary, but possible.

KCP has been led by a voluntary group of women almost since its inception. These women, comprising of local women along with myself have worked to make learning opportunities available and accessible to the community. These women have organised adult education classes, holidays, jumble sales, social events, summer walks, and day trips. They have opened the school, welcomed and encouraged learners, made thousands of cups of tea, collected money to enable learners to save and go on holidays, cooked dinners, danced, laughed and cried together. When I spoke with my research participants to tease out the reasons why KCP worked they very often spoke fondly and with admiration about these local proactive women. As one participant put it, 'local people know local needs', another adult learner said 'the committee understand the people around, they fit in with everyone and everyone knows who they are, its all local people doing everything'.

A number of reasons were given for the sustainability of KCP, including the building of a strong foundation as well as an inclusive non-judgemental ethos perpetuated by the committee. One of the mature adult learners said 'if someone had an opinion they [committee] listened. Everyone felt important. You could disagree'. The voice of one young adult learner resonates with that of the older woman quoted above:

It lasted cos it was run properly from the beginning. And if you hadn't organised it properly it wouldn't have taken off ... and the fact that people went in there and they weren't looked down on and no one condemed them for the ... if they had a disability of some sort ... well I don't mean physical or mental ... I mean if I was just able to do ... say if I couldn't sew properly or knit properly or read properly nobody condemed me for that. They looked at me as if I was an equal. It didn't matter what I could do or what I was capable of doing (Young adult learner no. 4).

A member of the committee described the interaction and dynamic of KCP committee as one in which there were no bosses, and everyone had their say:

They were a great group of people. There was no bosses. No chairman. No ... everybody was the same. Everybody had their say. And everyone around that table were just out to do their best for the project. There was no am ... we never had a row sure we didn't ? ... There was never kind of a situation 'Ah you don't know what you are talking about I know better than that '. Just that we always kind of talked it out. And if we could we found a solution and if we couldn't we said well it will sort itself out...

My role as a member of the committee and as a leader was also referred to. It is difficult to write about oneself but if I leave it out I am doing the participants and KCP a disservice. They described my leadership style graphically. They said I

actively encouraged them and above all believed in the potential of people, and the possibility of change. The following extract from the committee focus group describe how the committee saw me. They had such faith and belief in me:

Voice 1: You told us we were going to get money and we believed you. We would have believed you if you told us we would be purple for the next year

Researcher: Would you?

Voice 1: We would yeah

Voice 2: You taught us how to beg anyway

Voice 3: You taught us how to beg

Voice 2: She did teach us how to beg. Ann had one suit for going to all the ... (laugh). Any time we were looking for money Ann used to take out the suit. Ann had a Sunday-going –to-a-meeting suit. And it was secondhand when when you bought it (big laugh)

Researcher- I did have a suit

Voice 2: Do you remember going to x occasion. I never came across such a shower of big headed geits in all my life. But you had to keep your mouth shut and smile and be very nice. You have to shake hands with the devil don't you?

Researcher: Why bother

Voice 1: Cos we cared about people

Voice 2: That was the only way we could get money so ...

Voice 1: In our own way we recognised how important this project was. Not consciously but unconsciously. I think that we did recognise that ...

Voice 2: We were like a dog with a bone we weren't going to let go

Voice 1: There was nothing in this area for people

Voice 3: Nothing for years and years

Voice 1: And Ann's belief in it ... and I think in a way ... you gave us belief

Voice 2: You made us believe as well

Voice 3: Believe

Voice 1: Everybody needs somebody to be the figure head if you like ... You made us believe ... I honestly believed that if you wanted the lottery and you wrote to them they would have give it to us (Laugh) I am very shocked we have not got it. I am here for my pension (big laugh)

Voice 2: I have news for you

Voice 1: Your belief in what was possible was far greater than ours. It was now tell the truth

Voice 1: You inspired us Ann. That's what you did. And we wanted to make it happen. If not for other people, for you at the time cos you had given us so much of your time and effort into setting it up. And you were right like. You were dead right. And you see we wouldn't have had that kind of confidence in ourselves. You made us confident in ourselves at that time.

Confident that we could do whatever. It got better as the years went on.

Being a member of the KCP committee brought its own benefits. The women built skills, found a medium through which to contribute to their community, and a chance to advocate on behalf of others. One of the committee members became a member of CLVEC. She was in a position to make contacts and bring information to the committee of KCP and to SPACE, thus very practically building bridging capital between our organisation and others including the Centre for the Unemployed where some of our members used the adult education and crèche facilities.

The committee members described the decision making processes as open, consultative and inclusive. As a member of the statutory organisation put it, 'Ye

worked hand in glove with the local community, with people who were leaders, and people who were paid'. One member described the committee as 'compatible ... we spoke the same language. We were all after the one thing and there was no politics involved in it'. The process of decision making is aptly expressed in the words of another committee member:

We discuss things completely first and then we agree what we are doing. And only for that it wouldn't have went so well. But we kindof work together. And if the old dance comes up we all go away and get a few things we can raffle and we'll say...  
(Mature adult learner and committee member no 3).

## **8.6 Summary**

This chapter began with an exploration of the characteristics and dynamics of social capital. The building blocks of social capital, trust and networking were discussed. The theme of leadership was explored with specific emphasis on developmental leadership, particularly in relation to its capacity to activate social capital. Finally, the factors which contributed to the survival, success and sustainability of KCP were acknowledged, including factors associated with the host school, the multi service nature of the school, intergenerational involvement, continuity of personnel, respect, high aspirations, and finally elements of social capital including trust and networking.

## **8.7 Chapter conclusion**

KCP worked. It worked because 'people cared'. KCP provided a mechanism through which this care could be channelled, nurtured, and celebrated. Members of KCP developed and shared a culture of care, respect, and trust, all firmly embedded within a philosophy of hope. KCP was sustained by long term commitment of an effective local a committee with a vision to provide learning opportunities for their neighbours. This committee were guided by a developmental leadership philosophy that redistributed the balance of power within the learning context. Local women along with myself were disturbed by the lack of learning opportunities and we were both angry and courageous enough to explore new learning territories. Bonding and bridging capital were generated through active participation in all of the activities, both classes and social events.

KCP worked because it was fun. We laughed, cried, danced, and sang together, and in the midst of that human interaction I believe we found a profound love and care for our fellow human beings. KCP worked because we had a home, which was welcoming and supportive. KCP worked because we had a long-term funder who provided tutors and support for our activities. KCP worked because of tutors taught in an inclusive way, cared for their students, and stayed with us for long periods of time. KCP worked because it embraced developmental leadership.

Fundamentally, KCP work because of an ethos of respect which permeated all aspects of the learning environment within the school building.



**CHAPTER NINE**

**RESEARCHER AS PARTICIPANT**





## **9. RESEARCHER AS PARTICIPANT**

### **9.1 Introduction**

During the years of researching and writing this thesis I constantly struggled to locate and indeed integrate myself into this study. When I discovered feminist emancipatory research (FER) I realised that the question was not whether to locate myself but how. In this thesis I act as a conduit through which the stories and wisdom of Kileely Community Project (KCP) are communicated. Through an adaptation of Reinhartz's framework I offer you the reader an insight into how I came to be that conduit and co-composer of knowledge. I have endeavoured to address the challenge to locate myself within this work in two ways. Firstly, I weave my voice with those of the voices of research participants throughout various chapters of this thesis. Secondly, in this chapter I take an autobiographical approach and claim and locate my own voice. Indeed, Lyons and Kubler LaBoskey contend that 'storying the person contextualises him or her, makes that person present to us in all his or her humanity' (2002:14). I now share my own story, which incorporates memoir, journey, and transformation. I choose to 'write myself into' this work in the belief that 'the construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who created it' (Kohler-Riessman, 1993:v).

Fundamentally, 'researchers are human and therefore necessarily subjective' (Babbie, 2007:75). According to Freeman 'autobiography is itself a fundamental form of narrative inquiry' (2007:120) and therefore sits comfortably within this work.

### **9.2 Situating the self**

The struggle to locate myself within this study was resolved through an in depth literature review as well as in depth discussions with my supervisors. This process provided a sound rationale for inclusion of my voice and experiences as integral parts of this work. Fonow and Cook for example argue that feminist research 'expressly supports self-examination and sharing', and that 'a recognition of the importance of the personal is fundamental to feminist philosophy' (1991: 266). To paraphrase Palmer, the researcher working from this philosophy asks 'who is the self that researches?' (1998:4). Indeed Lieblich in conversation with Clandinin and Murphy contends that 'what we require of our interviewees is something that we should be able to look at in ourselves as well' (Clandinin and Murphy, 2007:643). Fine and

Wise concur with this philosophical stance, which is inclusive of the person of the researcher. They believe that we have ‘responsibility to talk about our own identities, why we interrogate what we do, what we choose not to report on, on whom we train our scholarly gaze, who is protected and *not* protected as we do our work’ (1996:263).

Qualitative research has an inherently personal dimension in which the researcher is by her/his very nature personally and relationally engaged in the research process. The nature of that engagement is addressed in depth in Chapter Three ‘Methodology: Beyond tools of Inquiry’, specifically in relation to a feminist emancipatory research philosophy. Powdermaker sees the researcher (anthropologist) as ‘a human instrument’, involved in the process of studying other human beings and societies (1966:19). According to Josselson ‘the researcher’s self, with its fantasies, biases, and horizons of understanding, is the primary tool of inquiry. Therefore self knowledge and self-reflection become necessary to the project to tease out what aspects of what is “observed” derive from the researcher’ (2007:545). Clandinin advocates the ‘bracketing in’ of the self (Clandinin, 2007). The ‘bracketing in of self’ once viewed as ‘a contaminant’ (Fine, et al; 2000:108), enables the reader to gain an insight into the researcher both as an individual and in relationship to participants. This is critical to understanding qualitative research since according to Clandinin relationship is key within the research process (Clandinin:2007). Indeed, according to Pink ‘subjectivity should be engaged with as a central aspect of ethnographic knowledge, interpretation, and representation’ (2007:23).

The ‘bracketing in’ of the researcher has implications within the broader epistemological debate concerning the generation and validation of knowledge. According to Aull Davies researcher reflective practice, once seen as ‘an undesirable effect to be minimised’, is now welcomed ‘as an opportunity to liberate the field from a positivist commitment to value free scientism’ (1999:178). Furthermore, the feminist and post modernists ‘emphasised the socially situated nature of knowledge and hence the importance of specifying the knower’ (ibid:178). Stanley rejects the ‘myth of the detached scientific observer/researcher’, and conceptualises the researcher as ‘an experiencing and comprehending subject at the heart of intellectual and research life’ (1996:47). Finally, Richardson forewarns the self-reflective

researcher of the 'complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing' (2000:254).

The incorporation of an autoethnographic approach is useful on a number of levels. Firstly, since 'ethnographic knowledge is in part a product of the social situation of ethnographers' (Aull Davies, 1999:179), situating the researcher in relation to the text is simply common sense. Secondly, creating a biography, facilitates the researcher to situate herself in a reflexive framework, and offers added value. According to Aull Davies 'another use of autobiography in ethnography is the consideration of the effects upon the ethnographer of the experiences of fieldwork, using others to learn more about and reflect upon oneself' (ibid: 179). While this is not primarily an autobiographical text, the autobiographical element is designed to add to its authenticity. According to Quinn Patton, 'autoethnography increases the importance of voice and raises the stakes, because an authentic voice enhances the authenticity of the work, while an inauthentic voice undermines it (2002:88). Wincup highlights the importance of recognising the emotional dimension and sees 'feelings as a source of strength, not weakness, which allows [her] to develop a truly reflexive and honest account of the research process' (2001:25). Furthermore she contends that 'sensitivity to [her] own feelings and those of participants deepens understanding and enhances the creation of meaning (ibid:31). By using an autoethnographic narrative approach in this study I believe I enhance its authenticity and create a medium through which the reader might more readily identify or resonate with this work.

A number of other researchers, including Peshkin, problematised research subjectivity. In his 1988 paper, 'In search of subjectivity – One's own', Peshkin urged researchers to 'systematically seek out their subjectivity, not retrospectively when the data have been collected and the analysis is complete, but while their research is actively in progress' (1988: 17). In his search to excavate his own subjectivity on a specific research project he discovered multiple I's, which he calls 'a subset', specific to the conditions of that research. While he believes we 'bring all of ourselves-our full complement of subjective I's- to each new research site, a site and its particular conditions will elicit only a subset of your I's' (ibid:18). On-going reflection and analysis permits the researcher to engage with the research process in an informed way, thus enabling the researcher to 'to avoid the trap of perceiving just that which my own untamed sentiments have sought out and served up as data'

(ibid:20) and to emerge having learned more about themselves as people who ‘do’ research.

Reinharz, adopts a somewhat different approach to Peshkin. She conceptualises the researcher self, in terms of the *brought self* and the *created self*. She contends that the ‘brought’ and ‘created’ selves are those that are relevant to the people being studied’, in that ‘they shape or obstruct the relationships that the researcher can form, and hence the knowledge that can be obtained’ (1997:4). Thus a direct connection is made between the relationship the researcher establishes with her participants, and the nature of information which might be obtained. Later in this chapter I apply and extend this framework as a means by which to share my own story.

The personal aspect of qualitative research is multi dimensional. It resides in the inter-personal relationships between researcher and participants, and in the intra-personal domain of the researcher. Quinn Patton, for example, describes direct personal experience and engagement not only in terms of the relationships between researcher and participants, but also in terms of the researcher’s engagement ‘with her own experiences, both from childhood and day to day in her adult life’ (2002:47). In this way he also acknowledges the brought and created self. Clandinin also interrogates the notion of the ‘brought and created self’. She posits that ‘we come to each new inquiry field living our stories’ (2000:63), and advocates that we become ‘autobiographically conscious’ (2000:46) as we work through our studies. Indeed according to Harris and Huntington ‘all aspects of life have emotional components including the academic production process that involves us as researchers in actively seeking to understand aspects of human behavior and/or the world around us’ (2001:129). Oakley calls on the researcher to ‘invest his or her own personal identities in the relationship’ in order to achieve best results (1981:41). Indeed, personal investment involves attention not only to the interactive relationship and process of interviewing but also the reflective personal arena, what Clandinin names as working ‘with ourselves’ (2000:61). Attention to self therefore is not optional but an integral dimension to effective qualitative research.

Qualitative research makes personal and professional demands on the researcher. Qualitative research demands we feel deeply and according to hooks ‘to feel deeply we cannot avoid pain’ (1997:xxiii). The challenge is not to just to feel the emotions

but to acknowledge, understand them and consequently work from an informed perspective. This is not easily done as 'emotional labor is often ignored or devalued across a range of arenas, as it is seen as women's work' (Harris and Huntington, 2001:131). Deegan repudiates the 'benign unidimensional portraits' painted by some qualitative researchers, and advocates reflexive practice which interrogates the 'multiplicity of researcher roles' which might be encountered in fieldwork (1995: 350). Likewise, Grumet warns against becoming 'infected with a sociologist's imagination', whereby 'we disclaim our own experience of our identities if we believe individuals experience themselves as professionals, blue-collar workers, bourgeoisie' (1988:174). Fine and Deegan problematise the relationship between the researcher's attributes and the research process. They contend that 'attributes such as humility, empathy, maturity, energy, determination and creativity are not ends in themselves, but a means through which rapport can be established, data gathered, and theory generated' (Fine and Deegan, 1996:445). Deegan's call for a 'self portrait of the researcher, warts and all' (1995:350), poses a challenge to qualitative researchers, to extend beyond personal reflection and to make oneself known to the reader, echoing Grumet's call to have 'courage to reveal our work' (1988:93). Our work is ultimately reflective of who we are. While this honesty may place the researcher in a 'vulnerable' position, Clandinin repudiates the antithesis where the researcher may 'stay silent, or present a kind of perfect, idealised, inquiring moralising self' (2000:62).

Research has a profoundly personal political dimension. It holds the potential to engage with the creative self. Grumet identifies a self-serving aspect for the woman who engages in the external world of work. She believes that the woman who survives the demands of relationships 'to work in the world ... is often engaged in the project of her own belated individualism and expression' (1988:28). This echoes Kent's reflection on her experiences as researcher, in that she believed that 'it is through failures as well as successes, both our own and those of others that we learn about being human' (1992:23). As qualitative researchers 'we are in the parade we presume to study' (Clandinin, 2000:81). Indeed, 'narrative practice lies at the heart of self-construction' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000:104). This work is in part an exploration of my humanity, echoing Grumet's thesis of the human need for 'creative expression'.

What are the factors that motivate a researcher to engage in a process which demands personal investment and reflection? Stanley identifies a number of motivational factors which include ‘utilitarian purposes ... because it is socially and/or intellectually meaningful; it engages their intellectual, political and other interests; it challenges their existing skills or knowledge’ (1996:48). However, she also unearths a further dimension to feminist researchers’ motivation, in that she believes feminist researchers feel a ‘necessity to carry out particular research because of the topic and/or approach and the perceived resonance between these and the personal context of the researcher’ (ibid:48). The personal context of the research is integral to this study. Indeed, according to Byrne and Lentin, the ‘feminist researcher accounts for herself and her motivation in carrying out a particular piece of research by placing herself reflexively within her research text’ (2000:8). Banister, whose work was based on women’s mid-life experiences, believed it essential to ‘reflect on my (her) own presence in the field’ (1999:9).

### **9.3 Locating myself within this study**

I answer the call to declare myself, by excavating the motivation that led me into this field of work, and ultimately, into this study. Through this declaration, I reject the ‘colonizing discourse of “Other”’ (Fine, 1994:70) thus creating a canvas for participants’ stories and mine to interweave, a process whereby ‘the two narratives of participant and researcher become, in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry’ (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:5). Like Bar-On, in declaring himself in relation to his study, I am not a distanced ‘honest broker’ but an invested researcher (1996:10), in which I co-construct knowledge, and act as a conduit between the worlds of participants and reader.

This thesis is the physical manifestation of seven years of reading, teaching, training, writing, thinking, interviewing, analysing, and reflecting. On this epic journey I interviewed participants and learned about the effect of KCP on their lives. I came to know them and they came to know me at a deeper level. ‘Self-disclosure’ (Byrne and Lentin, 2000:257), was an integral part of the research process. In this chapter the dynamic of self disclosure is extended beyond the intimacy of the interview into the public domain to the reader. By extending that relationship into textual form I aspire

to create an 'active text', (Stanley, 1996:48), which engages readers to 'grapple' with the issues being explored.

Maximising the capacity of the reader to engage with the text is problematised by Reinharz and others. Reinharz contends that the reader needs to know 'what the researcher's attributes mean to the people being studied' (1997:4). By situating my story, inclusive of relationships with participants, within the brought and created framework, I aspire to make this work accessible. Grumet speaks of the 'courage to reveal our work', (1988: 93) and the need for private space to create it and public space 'to serve the fruit of her inquiry to others' (ibid:94). Both public and private spaces are necessary to nurture artistic expression. This thesis is to an extent the public manifestation of the creative private space.

Narrative inquiry is relational. It fosters a tension, which demands that the researcher must 'fall in love' with their participants, yet they must also step back and see their own stories in the inquiry, the stories of the participants, as well as the larger landscape on which they all live' (Clandinin, 2000:81). In coming to know the participants' stories I came to a deeper understanding of my own. While to some extent this self-knowledge emerged in the isolation of my reading and writing, it predominantly evolved in the dynamic arena of interaction. This interaction occurred in the interview context, during my analysis of interviews, and in the course of site visits. Miller contends that interview work 'is the quintessential ethical project' (1996:131), in that it facilitates self reflection 'in the interplay of the self and the other – the dialogue of the I and Thou' (ibid:131). He further contends that 'dialogue by means of language is what unites people in relationship' (ibid p.137), echoing Friere's discourse on dialogue. Furthermore Miller contends that dialogue serves the participants, whose stories are listened to and understood, and who have the opportunity to explore 'deeper levels of meaning' (ibid:137). In this interplay, 'the researcher is changed as well' (ibid:138). Miller describes the research process as a search in which researcher and participant 'are engaged in a process of exploration and inquiry ... each attempting to both discover the other and rediscover the self'. His thesis resonates with my experience. Narrative research proved to have a personal transformational dimension, echoing Stafford's thesis that 'I do not make the story; the story makes me' (Stafford, 1991:28).

The qualitative researcher may adopt a number of roles in the field. Gold contends that ‘...a field worker selects and plays a role so that he, being who he is, can best study those aspects of society in which he is interested’ (1958: 223). According to Clandinin ‘those aspects of society in which he is interested’ emerge from ‘our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines’ (2000: 121). This chapter attempts to locate me, ‘being who I am’, within this study. Gold sees the social researcher as ‘a social interaction device for securing information ... and a set of behaviours in which the observer’s self is involved (1958:218). Like Reinharz, Deegan, Grumet and Quinn Patton, he conceptualises this role as reflexive, one in which the researcher ‘continually introspects raising endless questions about the informant, and the developing field relationship, with a view to playing the field work role as successfully as possible’ (Gold, 1958:218). He subdivides the role of the social researcher into four categories, that of complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant, and complete observer. As researcher I principally assumed the role of ‘participant as observer’, in the formal sense during interviews, and in an informal sense during my continued involvement with KCP, the school and families in the community. In fact, my on going involvement meant that I had endless opportunities for triangulation of findings, and for checking back with informants, increasingly deepening my appreciation of the people, their community, and the potential of research to gather and unveil social truths.

#### **9.4 Summary**

In the preceding sections I acknowledged my struggle in locating myself in this work. I subsequently presented a well-informed rationale to answer this dilemma. Drawing on a diverse body of work I made the case for the qualitative researcher’s need to be ‘autobiographically conscious’ (Clandinin, 2000:46). I have endeavoured to unravel the demands made on the researcher who embraces this philosophical perspective, and in so doing I embraced and extended Reinhartz’s ‘brought and created self’ framework, which informs the next section of this chapter.

#### **9.5 The brought, created, and emerging self**

In this section I profile myself as researcher in this study. I adopt Reinharz’s concept of the brought and created self, and extend it to include the emerging self.



### 9.5.1 The seed is sown: The brought self

I was born at home on 5<sup>th</sup> September in 1959 in a two- roomed condemned terraced house<sup>1</sup> on High Road Thomondgate, on the north side of Limerick. My mother, Juliet, says one room was our bedroom, and the other was ‘everything else’. We were initially squatters in this leaking hovel. Eventually, the owner collected rent. My brother was born one month premature on my second birthday. My twin sisters were born two months premature two years later. My father, Kevin, worked as a labourer in the Cement Factory in Mungret, Co. Limerick. My mother worked full time in our home caring for her family and she also cared for her parents.

I started primary school at 5, and I’m told I kicked the doors for the first week, and insisted on going home. Ironically, this was the school that was subsequently to become a major focus of my working life, and the site location for this thesis.

I don’t remember a lot about my early years except that as children we were loved beyond measure, given lots of encouragement, and had a strong network of aunts, uncles, and grandparents who were very good to us. When I was about 6 my family moved to the Bull field, a new corporation estate on the south side of the Limerick City, now Kennedy Park. Each morning my mother loaded her kids into the pram and walked back to the north side, where we played in the lane where her parents lived. We ‘lived’<sup>2</sup> on the south side for about 6 months and then got a ‘swop’<sup>3</sup> to Ballynanty. So from when I was about 7 years old I lived in Ballynanty, a big corporation housing estate on the northern edge of the city, and directly adjacent to Kileely. I went to St. Munchin’s Girls School in Ballynanty, as did my siblings. Ballynanty is part of an extended sector of corporation housing on the north western side of the city. This sector of housing includes St. Mary’s Park, part of Thomondgate, Kileely and Ballynanty. In the 1970s this sector was extended to include Moyross.

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<sup>1</sup> The house I was born in was condemned as unfit for human habitation and initially my parents were squatters, they later paid rent. The house was in very bad condition, with an extensively leaking roof, no hot water, no sanitation and a cold tap outside the back door. Accommodation was at a crisis point in Limerick at that time and my aunts would have lived in one room rented accommodation in different parts of town with very poor sanitation and cooking facilities.

<sup>2</sup> It is more correct to say we slept on the southside for six months as I didn’t go to school during this time and we ate most of our meals with our grandparents.

<sup>3</sup> Limerick Corporation tenants could swap houses by mutual agreement and permission from the corporation.

Story telling was a very important part of my family culture, and it was within this rich narrative culture that my love of story was sown and internalised. I grew up listening to stories of my mother's and father's childhoods. My father's family moved to Kileely from the tenements in the Limerick City when the estate was built in the 1940s. Kevin's childhood was fraught with poverty, hunger, and violence. Both his parents were widowed with two children each before they married each other, and then had four children together. Kevin grew up in abject poverty. Kevin spoke of his hunger as a child going to school. He told us he remembered fainting with hunger when another boy gave him a dig in the stomach on his way back to school at 'dinnertime'. His mother, Bridget, had the most wonderful sense of humour, which my father inherited, and our family folklore tells of my grandmother gathering her children around her and telling them stories to make them laugh, in the midst of poverty and sometimes homelessness.

Neither of my parents had attended Secondary school. Kevin was a bright child, and the story goes that his sixth class teacher, a Christian brother, came to my grandmother and asked her to keep him on at school and her reply was 'Wisha a stór don't you think I would if I could, but I have mouths to feed'.

My mother, Juliet, was from Thomondgate, and though her father, John, didn't have constant work, Juliet and her eight siblings did not suffer the abuses my father did. She had a very happy childhood even though she was ill for a lot of it, and rarely attended Primary school. In a chance meeting, a former neighbour who had 'done well', realised my mother suffered from serious illnesses. She sponsored milk, eggs, and butter to be delivered to my mother's home to nourish her. Juliet too was a bright child, and she taught herself to read by reading food labels.

I realise now that listening to my father's stories of his childhood gave me an insight into poverty that was to influence my world view. Growing up in the area I did also had an impact on me. I can remember some girls in my Primary school class being very poor, and I was aware from a young age that a number of families were only just surviving. I remember one girl in particular from a very large poor family. My mother often invited her to our home for a bowl of hot rice after school and gave her one of my two coats. Juliet would ensure that we didn't think we were better than people who were poorer than us, even though relatively speaking we had little enough

ourselves, by constantly telling us ‘that we were better than no one and no one was better than us’. Some of the girls I went to Primary school with did not transfer to Secondary school, and some who went to Secondary did not complete it.

My parents were acutely aware of the potential benefits education might bring. Juliet believed it was especially important to educate her daughters, as she believed boys had some possibilities of getting a trade, but a woman would need to be educated to be independent. I realise I grew up with a feminist mother. Kevin believed education was a key to quality of life, and did not want his children to labour as hard as he had. I remember his feet bleeding at the end of his working day from the effects of the hot cement dust. Passionate about our education, he kept our school reports in a tin box in his wardrobe. If any of his children missed school through illness he would ensure we caught up with lessons and kept up with the class on our return. On one occasion when one of his children was out of school sick for a few months, he went over to the school and asked how he could ensure we did not fall behind our classmates. Each evening when he came home from work he helped us with homework.

### **9.5.2 The seed germinates: The brought self**

We did not own a phone. On the day my Intermediate Certificate results came out I went to the phone box in the local shop and rang my father at work. To my knowledge it was the only phone call ever made to him at work. The seeds which had been lovingly and carefully sewn had germinated, and I had managed to gain my first educational qualification. I stood in the wooden phone box my heart beating with anticipation of his response. He was so proud that I had done well. In fact, he was completely biased about his children, believing all of us to be extremely clever and talented, to the point I am sure, he must have annoyed some of our relations, neighbours, and friends.

My father was killed in a road accident when I was 16, the summer after my Intermediate Certificate. On a sunny July day in 1976, when he was out cycling with his kids a car hit his bicycle, threw him into the air, and he came crashing down on his head. His skull was fractured, and three days later, he died, following brain surgery in St. Finbarr’s hospital in Cork. He didn’t live long enough to see any of us finish Secondary school or college. His sudden death had a major impact on all our

lives. My parents' shared commitment to educating their children remained intact. While my family struggled to cope with his loss, the quest for educational attainment remained a priority. My mother managed to keep all four of us in Secondary school and we all completed Leaving Certificate examinations.

As I progressed through the educational system I realised it was failing many young people. I was conscious that my peers were leaving school without any qualifications. They were leaving the school to get low paid jobs, or raise their children. This insight combined with my father's childhood stories of poverty motivated me to engage consciously with my own learning. This was not easily done in the latter years of Secondary school as my father's death took a heavy toll on my family. Our maternal grandparents were especially good to us. They gave us a lot of support. My grandmother Ann died suddenly one week before my Leaving Certificate examination, catapulting my family into renewed grief. Our neighbours allowed me to use their house to study for my Leaving Certificate during the week of the funeral. Juliet lost her beloved mother and husband within eleven months.

I did my Leaving Certificate in 1977. Having achieved the necessary academic requirements, I went to Mary Immaculate College (MIC), University of Limerick, and graduated with an honours B Ed. degree in 1980. When I was in MIC I made some very good friends. We had long discussions on education, life, and future plans. This group of successful students contrasted sharply with my former classmates, many were from Limerick, but not from a community such as mine.

### **9.5.3 True leaves: The brought self**

In September 1980 I began teaching in St. Lelia's school, my first teaching job, my 'first leaf', began in the very classroom where many years earlier I had kicked the doors on my first day at school. My first class was a Junior Infants class of 56 boys and girls. I taught this very large number for about six weeks until another teacher was appointed and then the number of children in my class was reduced. The nearby corporation estate of Moyross did not have a school at the time and a lot of children came down to Kileely to our school. St. Lelia's became a six-teacher school in 1980 and I was the 5<sup>th</sup> teacher on staff. A new school was built in Moyross in the mid 1980s, which naturally caused a decrease in the numbers of children coming to our

school. During this time I also worked as a voluntary literacy tutor with teenagers who had left the formal school system and were attending youth programmes. This experience confirmed my belief that the educational system continued to fail to meet the needs of the young people most in need of the potential benefits latent within it.

#### **9.5.4 In full flower: The brought self**

In October 1985, due to be deployed elsewhere as a consequence of falling enrolment, I opted instead to go on career break. In a converted cloakroom, I began an uncharted journey which would bring me personal growth, hope, profound learning, fun, frustration, worry, and a degree of professional recognition. Kileely Community Project (KCP) provided me with the opportunity to bring my ideologies to full flower. A number of factors contributed to my ability to make the decision to stay in the school. In the preceding years I had literally fallen in love with the school and with the kids. And I was moved not only in a romanticised way of enjoying children's growth and development, but in a most profound way that spoke to my very soul. On a specific occasion I had witnessed an individual child's pain when he was punished by his parents for a misdemeanour. His personal circumstances were fraught with difficulties. That moment has remained with me all these years and has served as a motivating factor for my work. I captured this critical moment in my poem, *Child*, (Appendix I). Another factor which enabled me to stay was my confidence in my teaching ability. I believed that my skills could contribute positively to children's lives. On a personal note, I also had a young baby, and did not want to be deployed to work too far away from him.

When I was working as a teacher in the school prior to going on career break, I had often worked with individual parents advising them on how they might support their children's learning. I found this very rewarding and very productive. I believed that if parents and teachers could work with a shared focus it would reap dividends for the child. Based on the positive experience of working with individual parents I devised a programme with a parent group. The programme was designed to build parent's skills in supporting their children's learning. This programme was flexible, and responded to identified needs as the programme progressed.

This forum where adults learned how they could support their children's learning was the seedbed for the development of KCP. I was right in the middle of a growth process, on a very steep learning curve, actively involved in dialogue about adult learning needs, both in terms of supporting their children, and in terms of identifying their own needs. I was very familiar with the scenario where the parents' aspirations for their children outweighed their own personal educational attainments. These parents very much like my own, had left school early, and now wanted to support their own children's learning. The skills, attitudes, and expertise necessary to develop and sustain this project were not familiar territory. I left the formal, structured, teacher role within the educational system and migrated into new unexplored territory.

And so KCP was born. It grew to include morning and evening classes for adults, a separate strand for young lone mothers, an after school programme, a pre-school and a crèche. A local management committee was set up and funding was acquired to support the project. Chapter Six tells the story of the evolution of KCP. The evolution and development of KCP is intrinsically interwoven with my own life, in that phases of the project development reflect phases of my own development.

As project director I had to learn skills which would enable the project to grow and develop. By trial and error I learned to fund raise, to negotiate with agencies and professionals working in the community, and work with statutory and voluntary bodies. On a day to day basis I learned how to teach adults, how to work with families at risk, how to work with mixed age groups and how to nurture involvement. There was huge personal growth and an empowering sense of satisfaction. As women and learners, we organised Christmas socials in an empty classroom, where we danced, sang, and laughed into the small hours of the morning. These events will always be part of the happiest memories of my life. The deep satisfaction of observing children relaxed and happy on our holiday trips were for me some of the most worthwhile moments of my life. But there were also dark moments, when I questioned my direction, motivation, skills and ability. There were times when I woke in the night, wondering whether I was making a positive difference in children's and women's lives, whether indeed I had the authority to advocate with agencies on their behalf (even with their permission), and whether my ability matched the need.

At this point I will reflect on how it was possible for me to take this unusual step. Firstly, as I mentioned earlier my father was killed in a road accident when I was 16. As my family came to understand and analyse the impact of this in our lives, we realised that life is very short, that you must grab opportunities and live your dreams, because you might not have the opportunity later on. So when I was considering giving up teaching to work with parents I asked my mother what she thought. She encouraged me strongly saying that life is short and you must follow your dreams, and very importantly that, as I had succeeded in getting a qualification I could always teach again if I wanted to. She never had any objections to any of us working at different jobs, or taking risks, once we had a safety net of a qualification to fall back on. My partner encouraged me to follow my instincts and supported me at every stage of my work. He was working as a youth worker at the time and we shared a belief that working with young people and trying to make a difference in the world was work worth doing. I also had a wonderful pool of friends who supported and encouraged me, some were teachers, others were youth workers, and social workers.

The school Principal encouraged me, but said, 'if you are going to do something for God's sake do it right'. She was concerned about my career prospects. It is also true that becoming a mother in the summer of 1985 had a major impact on my motivation to contribute to the wellbeing of children. Field Belenky et al. contend that 'often, parenthood initiates an epistemological revolution' (1986:35). Becoming a mother filled me with the commitment that all children should have an equal opportunity to my child, that childhood was precious, and that while he was precious to me, in the greater scheme of things he was equal to all other children. My second child was born in 1989 in the midst of the development of the project, and her birth reinforced my belief that my 'personal children' as I called them, had equal rights to develop their talents and abilities with the children I worked with. Also my experiences as a child growing up in a disadvantaged area, attending designated disadvantaged schools, and an awareness of how the educational system had failed my school friends, had an impact on me. I was conscious that I was part of that system, with skills that could enable children to achieve.

I also felt frustrated and disturbed. Social workers were involved with a small number of the families I was working with. A rapid turn over of social workers, and lack of continuous service to families infuriated me. I also became aware of the lack of

supports for families and children in our society, and came to understand issues such as domestic violence, poverty, and gender inequality at a very real level.

As the project developed it impacted not only on my life but also on my family life. The 'Three O'Clock School' visited my home, the 'Three O'Clock School' kids knew my partner and kids, and there was a lot of interaction with my family. My two sisters<sup>4</sup> did their childcare placements in the 'Three O'Clock School'. The extent to which my family became involved in the project was mentioned by a number of the interviewees who had been 'Three O'Clock School' attendees and project participants. I also realised the extent of my family involvement when I was sorting through photographs to bring along to interviewees<sup>5</sup>. I had kept hundreds of photographs and many newspaper clippings, articles and radio and television recordings, which covered the developments of the project over the years. I used these photographs in the interviews as part of my research methodology. As I sorted photographs into family groups I realised my own family were very much part of the fabric of the project. There among the photographs of the families I had worked with were photographs of my children with the 'Three O'Clock School' children, and also my partner, sisters and mother at some of our social events.

The development of a management committee, made up of local women along with myself was also a very important development at the beginning of the project. This is discussed in detail in Chapter Six and Chapter Eight. Members of the committee, all local women, sensitised me to the needs of the area, taught me to listen insightfully, and helped me to offer my skills and talents to the project in a way that was constructive. There is a strong bond between the committee members. These women with diverse talents and energies have together steered this project for over 20 years. This closeness to women in the area has taught me how to listen with my heart and act with my head.

After working directly with the project, for 6 years, in my various roles of tutor, member of management committee, and fundraiser, I returned to teach as a substitute teacher in the school itself. By this time the school had become a one-teacher school, and the teacher was out on sick leave. She retired from teaching a year later. KCP

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<sup>4</sup> My sisters both trained as childcare workers with Athlone Institute of Technology.



continued to grow and develop. This stage of development is explored in Chapter Six. During this stage I continued as Director of the project, continued to fundraise, to attend meetings and also to advocate on behalf of families. As the school grew we renovated the building and nurtured parental involvement all the time conscious of developing a holistic school based service for all learners.

I became Principal of the school in 1992 and continued to work as Principal of the school and director of KCP until 1998 when I answered an advertisement for project co-ordinator for the Targeting Educational Disadvantage project in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. The school was doing very well, enrolment was increasing, KCP was stable, and the building had been successfully renovated. So why would I then consider leaving the project and school which I loved so much and in which I had invested a lot of my time and energy. I can only say that I was “ready” for a change. I had worked through three distinctive phases of working within the school, an initial stage of working as a teacher in a classroom, a second stage of working to set up the project, and a third phase of working as teacher/Principal/Director of KCP. This constituted eighteen years of my working life. I really was very happy, there but felt it was time to move on, but not move away. I was seconded to MIC for a six week period in April 1998. I then went back to teach in the school in June and September and October. In October I returned to Mary Immaculate College, to work part time as co-ordinator of the Targeting Educational Disadvantage Project. This was the beginning of the fourth phase of my involvement with the school and project. When I went to work in MIC I was off site for the first time in eighteen years and the challenge for me was to forge a new and effective working relationship with the project and school. This is discussed and explored in Chapter Six. While I was convinced I was making the right decision I remember feeling very lonely. During my final days as Principal in the school, many of the parents thanked me for my work with their children and for my contribution to the school over the years. One of the parents wrote a poem on behalf of the parents and children and this was presented to me on my final day in the school, (Appendix J).

When I returned to MIC in October I had resigned from my position as Principal of the school. I chose not to be seconded to the college for a number of reasons. If I

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<sup>5</sup> I used photographs as part of my research methodology

were seconded I would have had to work from 9am –5pm full time. I wanted to have flexibility in my life and working part time for MIC would allow me to continue to work with the project in Kileely (on a voluntary basis). Also I love to sew and was in the process of completing a City and Guilds qualification in creative design and wanted the time to complete this. Furthermore I wanted the new Principal to have the freedom to develop her ideas, run the school without feeling she had to defer to me. The new principal was a staff member, who had worked with me when our school was a two-teacher school. I was conscious that I was still involved in running KCP located in the school and wanted to continue my involvement with the community and with the school if at all possible. She and I have continued to work very well together, and I warmly cherish her support for KCP.

In conclusion, I have attempted to manifest the brought self through a declaration of factors in my childhood, school experiences, and working life, which created the starting point and influenced my motivation to carry out this study.

## **9.6 Immersed in the field of research: The created self**

In 2001 I began to work on post graduate studies. I thought of doing an M.Ed but was encouraged to do an MA and later a PhD. The process of writing this thesis has enabled me to bring the strands of my work together and to gain a deeper understanding of myself, and the impact of KCP on the school, community and individuals. Initially, I had grave reservations about the authenticity of my position as researcher. My work and personal life have been intricately linked, avoiding what hooks calls a ‘disjuncture between what I do as work and how I live in intimate settings’ (2003: 120). I had fears that this would have a negative impact on how the work would be viewed by academia. Two factors quelled my fears. Firstly the encouragement I got from my supervisors and colleagues and secondly I discovered the feminist emancipatory research paradigm and within it, the permission to declare myself and my position as researcher and, this empowered me to take up the role of researcher with confidence.

This process of interviewing, researching, and reflecting has been yet another journey in my life. Fine and Deegan’s description of qualitative researchers as explorers resonated with my own experiences (Fine and Deegan, 1996:437). The process has

taught me much about myself, about my community and about my profession. I was challenged to 'mange my identity' and to 'problematise all statuses' (Aull Davies, 1999:101) as I took up the role of researcher. Deegan contends that 'little self-conscious reflection exists on the part that emotion plays in friendly field relationships' (Deegan 1995: 349). Gilbert recognises the challenges of emotional engagement within the research process and argues that 'emotionality is still constructed in opposition to rationality and professionalism, and the importance of emotions is denied' (2001:19). In the intimate interaction of fifty interviews and six focus groups, I was part of an honest discourse, a shared narrative, which evoked emotions in participants, myself and between us. I observed my own compassion. I was humbled by the love, respect, and care that existed for me as a person. I was deeply moved on several occasions, and indeed moved to tears, by the stories of participants who articulated the transformational impact of KCP on their lives. They spoke not only of the skills they learned in the classes they attended but of quality of interaction, of the ethos of KCP, of how they felt I treated them, and how I treated others. I listened in awe to their observations of me as a teacher, worker, and woman, and in the process learned about myself.

On one occasion, at the end of a long intensive interview I thanked my participant for her time. She looked deeply into my eyes and slowly replied, 'No, thank you Ann'. And in that moment, researcher and interviewee were united, we were two women who had deeply touched each other's lives. At another stage a young woman reminded me of an event that had occurred one evening as we travelled in a hired bus from Kileely to Roxboro swimming pool for our Friday night swimming class. I had completely forgotten the incident, but according to her, as we drove along the dock road the bus driver 'who was a blackguard' made remarks about a woman, working as a prostitute, who was standing on the footpath. According to my informant, the woman was the mother of one of my pupils and I 'scandalised' the bus driver for his comments 'cos you (meaning me) didn't want the women in the bus thinking any less of the woman', and my informant said she would never forget me for that.

Researchers may think that we are the only ones with the keen eye, observing actions and interactions. As the research process unfolded I realised, researching, that is observing and making sense of the world, is an inherent part of the human condition. The difference with professional researchers is that we situate ourselves within a

literature, within a discipline, and share our findings through the written as well as the spoken word. One young mother described how she observed me as a teacher,

I saw you dealing with people that were financially stable that were comfortable.  
And I watched you dealing with people that hadn't their supper. And you didn't  
take to nor from the people that hadn't their supper, be honest.

This research journey has given me a deep appreciation of the lived experiences of young people who experience difficulties within the educational system, of young mothers with limited resources and high aspirations for their children, and of adults who have left the educational system prematurely. Teachers and tutors have shared the struggles and joys involved in their work and this has challenged me to reflect on my own work and my own belief systems around educational provision and attainment.

Researching and writing this thesis brought many personal challenges. I came from a practitioner base, and I needed to read into the literature, hone my writing skills which were more accustomed to writing begging letters, and develop a focused study discipline. I was challenged to the core of my being. Listening to the interviews evoked strong emotions, writing and rewriting chapter drafts challenged my academic ability, meeting deadlines and negotiating my way through paperwork and bureaucracies challenged me on yet another level. But, I have emerged transformed from this process.

My strongest feeling is one of privilege, the privilege of being able to do this piece of work, the privilege of listening to the honest accounts of my interviewees, the privilege of being loved and cared for, challenged and encouraged, the privilege of working in a supportive academic environment. My created self has emerged, humbled by the love I was shown and confident that this work was worth doing. I always saw myself as a person of average ability who worked very hard, but in moments of insight, as I struggled to hear, write and learn, my self concept too was transformed.

## **9.7 The harvest: The emerging self**

Reinharz's framework of the brought and created self served well as a tool to conceptualise and locate my self within this study. The brought self informed the evolution of the created self. The created self enabled reflection and deeper understanding of the brought self. This insight echoes Banister's contention that 'participation in qualitative ethnographic research ... may be the first step towards a continual process of self-discovery for the researcher as well as for the participant (1999:6). The created self, with its precious insights and newly acquired skills, continues to emerge. As it emerges the brought self too strengthens and deepens. In this amalgamation, and beyond, a new self emerges. This new self emerges through a process of storying and restorying, listening and learning, reflecting and acting and ultimately through the capacity to 'listen to the self and the other at the same time' (Plath Helle, 1991:60). The story of KCP unfolded through a deep and intensive research process. My understanding of my own story is intrinsically linked to KCP and to the research process. It is about being willing 'to take the time and effort to become myself' (Gitlin and Peck, 2005:2). As Greene simply and eloquently put it, 'I am forever on the way' (1995:1). Clandinin contends that neither researcher nor participant 'emerge unchanged' (1985:365). This thesis then is part of the harvest, part of my self-discovery, 'warts and all'.

## **9.8 Chapter conclusion**

I have outlined my personal story and my career journey. Both are intrinsically linked, echoing Clandinin's thesis that 'researchers' personal, private and professional lives flow across the boundaries into the research site; likewise, though often not with the same intensity, participants' lives flow the other way' (Clandinin, 2000:115). To paraphrase Palmer again, 'Good researchers (teachers) join self and subject and students in the fabric of life' (1998: 11). Field Belenky et al. warn of the dangers in dicotomizing human experience, of compartmentalising life so that 'the blends and subtleties' of life and of experience disappear (1997:19). My life has been nourished by my involvement with KCP, by my involvement in both the school and community, and by the process of writing this thesis. In Rager's words 'it was a life-changing experience' (2005:24).

I have so much in common with the people whose needs are served by the project, I was once a child in a disadvantaged school, my parents did not have the opportunities to go to Secondary school, and I grew up in a low-income family. However, I am conscious that I am also different from those whose needs are served by KCP. I work in a third level college, I have a degree, and enough money to make decisions about where I want to live, what I want to eat, what medical care I need, and how to spend my leisure time. This is possible because I earn enough money to give me the spending power to make these decisions, and I earn that money because I have succeeded in the educational system. Imperfect as I believe it to be, the system rewards performance, which is acknowledged within the economy and within society. To be outside that system is to have less power and less control over your life.

In writing this chapter I am aware I expose sensitive parts of my family story. While I feel somewhat vulnerable in exposing personal details, I do so for a number of reasons. Firstly, as I said at the outset, this chapter is written to put me as researcher in context and offer the reader an insight into my life so that my motivation and relationships with participants can be understood. Secondly, the interviewees for this thesis were honest with me in revealing aspects of their lives. I feel a personal commitment to them to be equally honest, if I am to portray their honesty and the context of their lives. I feel I also have the responsibility to do so for myself. And, finally, as Palmer advises, ‘good teaching requires self knowledge: it is a secret hidden in plain sight’ (1998:3). The development of my self knowledge I believe was an integral part of this study, I expect it will improve my teaching and inform my life. Palmer states that ‘unlike many professions, teaching is always done at the dangerous intersection of personal and public life’ (1998:17). My impact on KCP and the KCP’s impact on me continue to this day, even as I write this thesis. KCP has in part moulded who I am and how I behave in the world. I hope I have not romanticised the process of developing and supporting KCP. Choosing to do this work had financial and personal implications. There were very lonely moments when I wondered whether or not I had made the right decisions in respect of developments within the project, after all I was trained as a teacher, but was operating as a teacher/community worker. I never felt I had made the wrong decision in setting up the project, but I did feel a responsibility to the people who were working with me, and who trusted me. Researching and writing this thesis has allowed me the opportunity to address some of those issues.

**CHAPTER 10**

**CONCLUSION: KILEELY COMMUNITY PROJECT, THE HEARTBEAT OF  
THE COMMUNITY**





## **10. CONCLUSION**

### **10.1 Introduction**

*Our true destination's not marked on any chart  
We're navigating for the shores of the heart  
(Johnny Duhan)*

This thesis tells the story of a journey. It is a journey of hope, love, and transformation. As a co-traveller on that journey I came to realise the importance of this journey and came to understand that this story must be written. The story had already been lived and been told as our community has a strong oral tradition. We tell and retell our stories, as a means of making sense of our realities and of building identity. This thesis captures those stories and generates theory, so that you the reader may come to know of us through our stories.

Grumet advises that storytelling 'is a risky business' (1987:321). She reveals the latent power within the story form by claiming that 'our stories are the masks through which we can be seen, and with every telling we stop the flood and swirl of thought so someone can get a glimpse of us, and maybe catch us if they can' (ibid:322). Indeed, according to Connelly and Clandinin 'we live inside stories' (1997:672).

In this chapter I revisit my research objectives, summarise this study, and share my conclusions.

### **10.2 Research objectives**

The quest to gain an understanding of the factors affecting learning accessibility within the three ecologies of home, school, and community is at the heart's core of this study. Kileely Community Project (KCP) manipulated some of the prevailing factors affecting learning accessibility within the three ecologies, within a specific context and time. The core research question, aimed at gaining an understanding of the factors affecting learning accessibility and how they might be influenced, is activated through an exploration of factors affecting the development, growth, impact and sustainability of KCP over a twenty-year period.

Specifically the research objectives are:

- To embed this study within a rich literature review;
- To describe the context and process in which KCP emerged and the process by which it evolved;
- To understand the impact of KCP on people's lives and on the ecologies of home, school, and community;
- To excavate the factors which enabled KCP to succeed and survive for over twenty years.

The method chosen to achieve this was a comprehensive exploration of qualitative data obtained from, and indeed with, people involved with KCP during its first 20 years.

### **10.3. Thesis summary**

This thesis captures the story of an educational journey and situates it in a rich literature review. The journey itself is described in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight where the growth, impact, and sustainability of KCP are storied. The earlier Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five contextualise this story.

In Chapter One 'Introduction' I presented a rationale for why this journey was undertaken. I subsequently outlined the research objectives and offered an overview of the structure of this thesis. I also introduced the theoretical constructs which inform this work and presented a rationale for the significance of this work. In Chapter Two, 'A Socio-Ecological Exploration of the Factors Affecting Learning Accessibility' guided by a review of the relevant literature, we came to understand that others have previously sailed in these waters and learn from their accumulated wisdom. In that chapter I developed a socio-ecological framework to inform the literature review and to guide the research process. I subsequently excavated the factors within the three ecologies of home, school, and community that impede or contribute to learning accessibility. The three ecologies of home, school, and community are not isolated islands but are connected through the bridge of partnership and respect. I advocated and explored partnership practice as a mechanism to advance learning accessibility. Finally, I presented two state funded

interventions, the Home School Community Liaison scheme in Ireland, and the Community School Movement within the USA, as examples of interventions informed by a partnership philosophy.

In Chapter Three 'Methodology: Beyond Tools of Inquiry' I described how I came to write the story. I embraced a feminist emancipatory research philosophy as a mechanism to inform and guide the research process. I outlined the parameters of case study research and, within it, presented my rationale for adopting a qualitative methodology, and specifically an autobiographical and biographical narrative approach to this study. In Chapter Four 'Data Sources and Collection Process' I introduce the travellers on the journey and described the process of collecting data and provided a detailed inventory of data sources.

In Chapter Five, 'Area Profile', I mapped the seascape on which this story unfolds. Informed by a rich cache of qualitative and quantitative data I described the social, economic, and cultural context in which KCP evolved. The census data which informs this chapter is brought to life through the voices of my research participants who graphically described the challenges of living with poverty and unemployment.

In Chapter Six, 'Journey of Hope: Transference, Transition and Transformation', I plotted the twenty year voyage and chronicled the development of KCP. I described the range of initiatives that evolved to meet the learning needs of adults and children, as well as the structures which sustained them. The interconnectedness of KCP with the host school and with the community is also highlighted. In Chapter Seven, 'Did Kileely Community Project Make a Difference?' I shared the impact of KCP on the lives of individuals and on the three ecologies of home, school, and community. In Chapter Eight 'Celebrating the Survival, Success and Sustainability of Kileely Community Project: Excavating the Factors that Made Kileely Community Project Work' I analysed the factors which facilitated a safe journey. Finally, in Chapter Nine, 'Researcher as Participant' I firmly situate myself within this work as guide, learner, and narrator.

## **10.4 Approaching this journey's end**

The story of how KCP impacted on learning accessibility within a specific timeframe has been told. This thesis is the culmination of seven years work, and is both an integral part of the journey of KCP, and is also a discrete journey in itself. We have come to the end of the journey of this thesis, but not to the end of the journey of KCP. KCP existed before this story came to be written, and will exist long after this thesis is submitted. Nor have we come to the end of my work with KCP or as a qualitative researcher. I have found voice in a new and exciting way and look forward with excitement and trepidation to more journeys ahead.

Now that this leg of the journey is over, the boat has docked at the pier in silent anticipation of sailing again. The passengers disembark and meet potential travellers who would like to navigate the same waters. The story of the voyage is told to those who wish to hear. The travellers describe their boat; the model they built to take them through fair and troubled waters and advise on how to build a similar boat that is capable of withstanding storms. They also advise on how best to sail it. These are the guiding principles, the sails that harness the energy to propel it through fair and troubled waters.

This is the ultimate contribution this thesis makes to knowledge; the model of educational intervention and the guiding principles which inform it. As I close this final chapter of the journey I will now describe the model of intervention and its guiding principles.

### **10.4.1 Kileely Community Project Model of educational intervention**

The model of educational intervention proposed in this thesis has a number of core characteristics. It is school based, incremental, community led, intergenerational, and ecological. This model of intervention delivers a needs-led programme within a power-sharing philosophy. The school building functions as a multi service facility for the community. All of these attributes have been discussed at length throughout this work.

#### **10.4.1.1 Kileely Community Project model of educational intervention: School based**

Prior to the development of KCP the school building housed a Primary school. Subsequent to the development of KCP it housed a Primary school, crèche, pre-school, SPACE project and Saturday morning art classes as well as all the morning and evening activities of KCP. The school was easily accessible, being physically situated in the heart of the community. It was also accessible because members of the community held keys and opened and closed the school as needed. Locating KCP within the school also gave instant access to potential learners. When parents or family members brought their children to the school they were introduced to the activities of KCP. The rooms in the school were used in creative ways. When classrooms were empty they were converted into a kitchen, a playroom, a sitting room, or a crèche. When the school enrolment grew these were reclaimed by the school for use as classrooms. But there is more to accessibility than making the physical building available for creative use. The attitudes and ethos of the school staff and the good will of the Board of Management also facilitated this accessibility and this will be discussed as part of the core principles that enabled this model to work.

#### **10.4.1.2 Kileely Community Project model of educational intervention: Incremental**

KCP grew holistically as a response to identified needs. We began with one eight week programme and over time developed different initiatives such as the adult education classes and the 'Three O'Clock School' which have endured all through the various stages of this learning journey. We also developed initiatives such as the SPACE project and the Saturday morning art classes which each lasted just a few years. The crèche and pre-school began as initiatives within KCP and evolved to be part of the FÁS CE scheme and the direct responsibility of the BOM. By starting small, learning to work together, identifying needs, developing skills and building on and celebrating success, KCP grew to meet the needs of learners within the resources available.

#### **10.4.1.3 Kileely Community Project model of educational intervention: Intergenerational**

Adults attended morning and evening classes, young women attended the SPACE programme, school-going children attended the ‘Three O’Clock School’, three year olds attended the pre-school, and toddlers and babies attended the crèche. Also, of course, children attended the host school. It was inevitable that members of the same family would be involved in different initiatives. This created a sense of cohesion, facilitated a common experience, and helped to develop a sense of identity and belonging. I also believe it facilitated the sustainability of KCP and the host school.

#### **10.4.1.4 Kileely Community Project model of educational intervention: Ecological**

From the outset KCP worked from an ecological perspective. We saw the learner firmly located within and across the home, school, and community ecologies. By its very nature this perspective demands that we think and act in a specific way. Our programmes, while located in the school, impacted on the home, school, and community. Adults brought their learning back into the home environment and in turn they brought their wisdom and learning to bear on the programmes on offer in KCP. Parents of ‘Three O’Clock School’ children supported children’s learning within a school setting. In many ways an ecological perspective resonates with the intergenerational tenet of this model. Working from an ecological perspective also demands working with a variety of stakeholders within the community and within the education and health services.

#### **10.4.1.5 Kileely Community Project model of educational intervention: Multi service**

Prior to 1985, St. Lelia’s school functioned more or less like any other school within the educational system. It provided learning opportunities for children from Junior Infants to First class. In 1985 a metamorphosis began to occur. The school building housed services for the wider learning community. The use of the school changed as the school became available to the wider learning community both during and after school hours. During school hours the teachers and children shared their learning

space with adult learners, tutors, babies, toddlers, and staff on the FÁS CE scheme. After school hours the school was used by a community of child and adult learners who attended after school programmes and adult education classes. This multi-service, integrated nature of the service provision built sustainability, and indeed solidarity.

#### **10.4.1.6 Kileely Community Project model of educational intervention: Needs led**

Potential adult education classes were identified by the KCP committee, all of whom have been active adult learners for the duration of the programme. These committee members dialogued with other adult learners to identify their learning needs. We also surveyed the adult learners to identify their needs. The programmes in the adult classes, SPACE project, and ‘Three O’Clock School’ were all moulded by the needs and expertise of learners, the skills of tutors, and the resources available. There were of course some surprises. The committee at one stage suggested swimming as an adult education class. I said it would never work. We didn’t have a swimming pool, and still don’t, on the north side of the city. Cost was also an issue. I also thought it was too adventurous a class to run at that stage. I was proved wrong. For several years we ran very successful swimming classes that involved hiring a bus and a swimming pool. The ability to listen, respond and take risks was a core element in the success and sustainability of KCP.

#### **10.4.1.7 Kileely Community Project model of educational intervention: Power sharing**

The location of KCP within a school building had a profound effect on how power was conceptualised and distributed, and ultimately how decisions were made. Firstly, the positive respectful relationships between the school, KCP and the FÁS CE scheme created the foundation for dialogue and consultative decision-making. The respectful sharing of resources between services also enabled a collaborative culture. Within KCP decisions were made by the committee who in turn consulted learners in relation to any matters arising at our committee meetings such as the range of classes to run, holiday destinations and the organisation of social events. This devolved consultative model of power sharing was common across the school, within KCP

initiatives such as the SPACE programme, the ‘Three O’Clock School’ and the FÁS CE scheme. This led to a cohesive service to children and adults.

#### **10.4.2 The guiding principles which enabled the survival, success and sustainability of Kileely Community Project**

The model of intervention has been described. This is the boat which we built to take us on our learning journey. The boat is of little value, beyond a thing of beauty, if it sits by the quayside or in dry dock. The principles on which KCP was built provide the sails to harness the wind and propel us on our journey.

The principles which enabled the model of intervention to be implemented may be understood in terms of a triad of interconnected constructs. These include our ways of thinking, our ways of acting, and our understanding of our emotional responses. Indeed this conceptualisation of a three dimensional process strongly resonates with the literature on hope, which I explored in Chapter Six, ‘Journey of Hope: Transference, Transition and Transformation’. Firstly, to live and act with hope demands critical thinking and secondly it requires a belief that change is possible and that I as an individual can be part of that change. Our ways of thinking impact on our ways of acting and our ways of acting affect our thinking. In order to implement this model it is necessary to reflect on how we think, how we act, and how we feel. It is also important to reflect on the relationship between these three dimensions. If we reflect on our actions and understand our emotional responses we will excavate the guiding philosophy that guides our actions.

The guiding principles emerge from the analysis of the rich narratives gathered in the research process. Apart from my overall analysis of data I also used two specific research questions as techniques to triangulate findings and gain a deeper understanding of the principles that make KCP work. When I carried out my research one of the triangulation tools I used was to ask participants to identify what a school would need to do in order to set up a project similar to KCP. This question served two purposes. At an earlier stage of the interview I had asked about the factors that made KCP work, and by asking about how another school could develop a project like KCP, I was in fact triangulating my findings. Furthermore, this question allowed me to be specific about the model, and the principles that would guide it.



Another technique I used was actually based on the antics of a child who attended the ‘Three O’Clock School’ when I was teaching there. This child, let’s call her Mary, used to look to the window into the kitchen where the ‘Three O’Clock School’ was in progress. She would climb up on the windowsill, knock loudly on the window and inform us that she would not be attending on that day. I would look her way, acknowledge her with a smile, say ‘that’s ok’ and continue with the work. The children ignored her as this was a recurring event and they were earnestly engaged in whatever activities we were doing at the time. Mary would knock again a couple of times and not getting any response, would then come into the school, open the kitchen door, and announce that she would not be coming to the ‘Three O’Clock School’ on that day. I would smile at her and then ignore her, as would all other adults and children in the room. Within a couple of minutes, Mary would slowly come into the kitchen, join a group, and be actively engaged in an activity. I always wondered what she saw when she looked in the kitchen window that enticed her to come to the door and then into the kitchen and join us. So when I came to study KCP in all its facets, I used the antics of Mary to help me gain an understanding of why KCP worked. I asked all the former ‘Three O’Clock School’ participants to describe what a child would see if they were outside looking in at the ‘Three O’Clock School’ and in this way I again was able to triangulate previous findings and understand and develop the guiding principles which made KCP work.

#### **10.4.2.1 Guiding Principles: Our ways of thinking**

In order to apply this model it is necessary to look at our ways of thinking in relation to educational intervention. In order to do so we need to consider the following elements:

- How we conceptualise the individual roles of children, parents, teachers and the broader community in relation to learning. Do we see these individual roles as proactive, reflective, and reflexive. Do we see the individual roles as mutually supportive and inter-dependent or do we embrace a more isolated culture;
- How we understand the role of the home, school, and community in relation to learning accessibility;

- How we conceptualise partnership. Do we see it as tokenism, or do we embrace it as a mechanism through which we can create an enhanced learning environment;
- How we understand the factors located in the home and community which support or impede learning. Do we understand the cultures of families and communities in which schools are located. We need to consider whether we are judgmental, fearful, appreciative, or even curious?
- How do we situate the learner. Do we see them from an ecological perspective or operate from a context specific model;
- What philosophical belief are we operating from, do we operate from a philosophy of hope, embedded in a belief that change is necessary and indeed possible.

#### **10.4.2.2 Guiding principles: Our ways of acting**

In order to apply this model it is also necessary to look at our ways of acting in relation to educational intervention. In order to do so we need to consider the following elements:

- How we engage with the other key stakeholders in the processes of educational change. This involves looking at personal communication styles and attitudes within and across contexts. We need to look at how respect and trust are generated and maintained;
- How we engage in leadership roles. We need to consider our style of leadership and reflect on whether it is intentional, courageous, reflexive and respectful;
- How open we are to taking risks, being inventive and creative or whether we maintain the status quo;
- Do we acknowledge and celebrate achievements for children, staff, parents and community members;
- How we embrace and promote dialogue as a means of engaging with all stakeholders.

### **10.4.2.3 Guiding principles: Engaging with our feelings**

Finally, in order to apply this model it is necessary to take cognisance of our emotional responses to our worlds. My own experience is captured in the opening lines of my poem 'Child'; 'He sits on my shoulder and whispers in my ear, It opens my heart like a battleaxe' (Appendix I). These few lines capture my emotional response in a situation where the circumstances of a child's life profoundly moved me to action. One of the major stimuli to the development of KCP was my emotional response to that child. This resonates closely with Field Belenky's 'inner voice and infallible gut' (1986:54). hooks and Gilbert caution us on the cynical reaction we may encounter when we pay attention to emotion. According to Gilbert 'emotionality is still constructed in opposition to rationality and professionalism, and the importance of emotion is denied' (2001:19). hooks contends that 'to speak of love in relation to teaching is already to engage in a dialogue that is taboo' (2003:127). To acknowledge and engage with the emotional dimensions therefore demands a degree of courage, and a willingness to engage with our emotional tapestries. As previously put forward in Chapter Six, the discourse of love, fear, hope, and anger, needs to permeate the educational debate so that it can inform, energise, and guide us to find ways to identify and address the learning needs of adults and children, and indeed of ourselves.

## **10.5 A final word**

I believe this study offers a unique insight into the evolutionary processes of building a community response to identified learning needs. KCP grew holistically from very humble beginnings and in so doing released the power latent within the community to address its learning needs.

It is my contention that the model is transferable across contexts and that it has much to offer specifically within the regeneration processes currently being undertaken in areas of Limerick City. Target areas of Limerick City are currently undergoing a regeneration process that will involve educational regeneration under the Social regeneration pillar. The vision document launched on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2008 recognised that schools play a critical role in 'tackling social exclusion and improving access for communities' (2008:19). Furthermore the document advocates that 'schools buildings

and facilities should also be quality neighbourhood hubs for community education, learning and development' (ibid:19). This study presents a successful model for intervention developed specifically to address learning accessibility using a local school building as a focal point to build and deliver a range of services to the community. It has much to offer any school that wishes to transform into a community learning facility.

This study is a journey, of itself and within the overall story of KCP. Reinharz suggests that within a study learning takes place on three fronts, on 'the level of the person, the problem, and method' (1992:194). I believe learning took place on all three dimensions. I have learned about myself 'as I stumbled', gained skills and I have in the process grown as a person. On the level of the problem being studied this thesis adds to the epistemology of intervention in the educational system by sharing the wisdom of participants and ultimately presenting a model infused with hope, trust and respect. In terms of method I have embraced the qualitative research paradigm, specifically through a narrative process of storying and restorying. In so doing I have acknowledged that emotion plays a key role in both action and research, and argued that imbedding this dimension has a positive effect on the quality of the research produced. Indeed, in storying we come to know who we are and claim personal and relational identity, and in so doing claim and reclaim the power to make a difference.

In this study I discovered that by 'being good to one another and good for one another' our school evolved to become 'the heartbeat of the community'.

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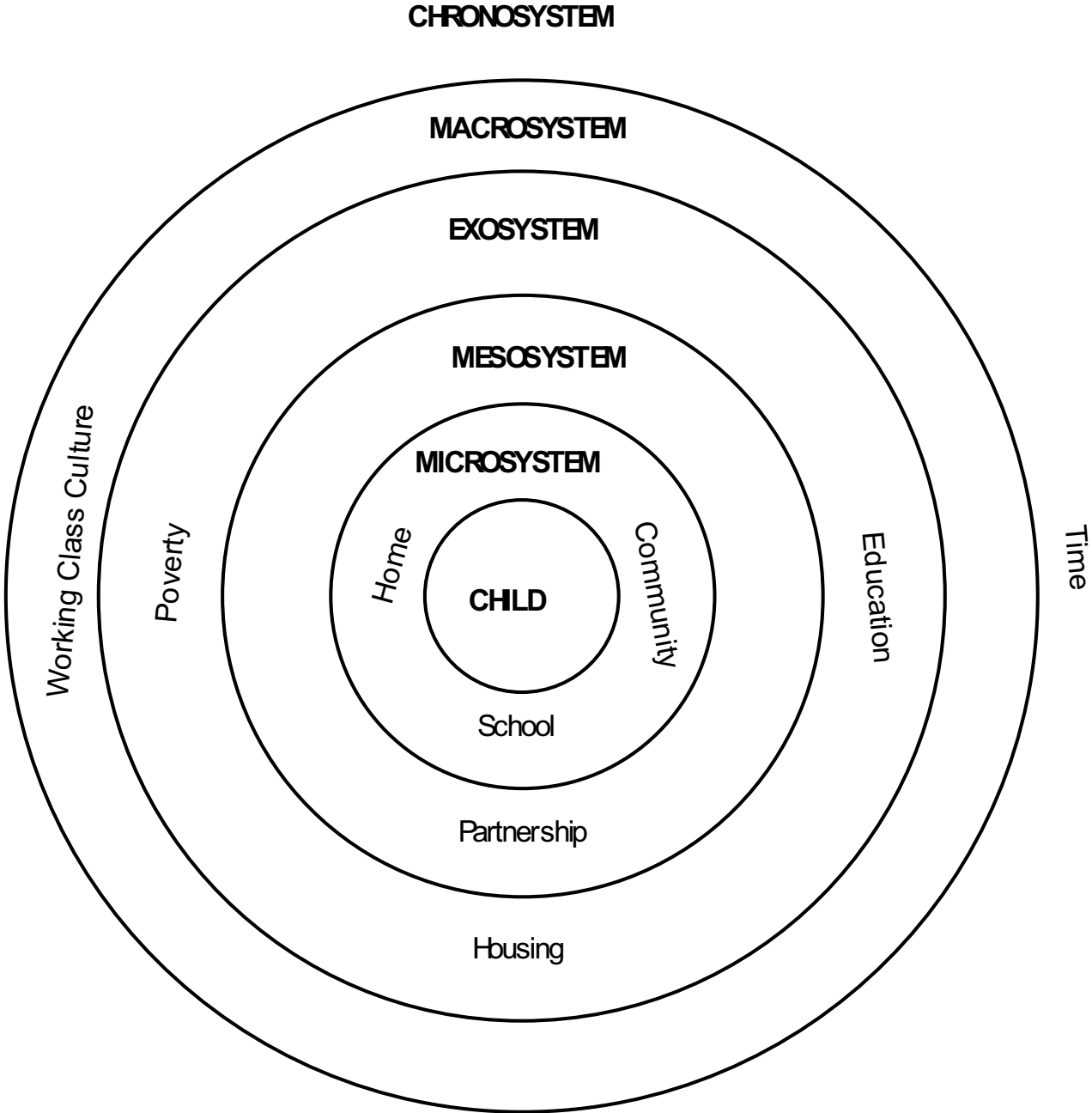
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Appendix A Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework





## **Appendix B List of secondary data**

### **B.1 Print data**

#### **B.1.1 Newspapers coverage**

Limerick Chronicle January 25<sup>th</sup> 1984.  
Limerick Leader, February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1986.  
Limerick Leader, April 5<sup>th</sup> 1986.  
Limerick Leader May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1986.  
Limerick Leader, July 15<sup>th</sup> 1986.  
Hatch 33, Limerick Unemployed Centre No. 2, September 1987.  
Limerick Leader October 31<sup>st</sup> 1987.  
Limerick Leader, Dec 5<sup>th</sup> 1987.  
Hatch 33, Limerick Unemployed Centre, No. 4 December 1987.  
Limerick Leader January 25<sup>th</sup> 1988.  
Limerick Post January 30 1988.  
Limerick Chronicle February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1989.  
Limerick Post February 11 1989.  
Limerick Chronicle February 21<sup>st</sup> 1989.  
Limerick Leader January 7<sup>th</sup> 1989.  
Limerick Chronicle February 21<sup>st</sup> 1989.  
Limerick Leader January 13<sup>th</sup> 1990.  
Limerick Post October 6<sup>th</sup> 1990.  
Limerick Leader October 6<sup>th</sup> 1990.  
Limerick Tribune 13<sup>th</sup> October 1990.  
Limerick Leader December 8<sup>th</sup> 1990.  
Limerick Tribune December 8th 1990.  
Limerick Leader, January 12<sup>th</sup> 1991.  
Limerick Leader June 4<sup>th</sup> 1994.  
Limerick Leader March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1996.  
Limerick Leader March 16<sup>th</sup> 1996.  
Limerick Leader 5<sup>th</sup> December 1998.  
Limerick Leader January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2000.

### **B.1.2 Other publications relating to KCP**

ALPHA, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1989.

Radio Teilifis Eireann, RTE's Free Press, ACCESS, Vol. 11, No. 15, Nov.23<sup>rd</sup> 1989.

Radio Teilifis Eireann, What's on Forum this week? Flyer, Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November 1986 RTE Radio 1.

Radio Teilifis Eireann, Education for the 1990's. Three Lectures given at a symposium in Radio Telefis Eireann, October 1989.

RTE Guide, November 21<sup>st</sup> 1986.

Reading News, Reading Association of Ireland, Vol. 11 No. 2 June 1987.

The Open Mind Guest Lecturer Series, 1989-1998, Institute of Public Administration.

Primary School Interventions, Scott Boldt, Marino.

### **B.1.3 Correspondence from me**

Letter to parents 25<sup>th</sup> September 1998.

Letter to parents Summer 1994.

Grant applications

### **B.1.4 Correspondence to me.**

Letter from Scott Boldt, Marina.

Letter from John Quinn, RTÉ.

Copy of letter from social worker to the programme manager Mid Western Health Board, recommending KCP for funding, August 8<sup>th</sup> 1986.

Nation conference of Priests of Ireland, 11<sup>th</sup> October 1993.

Conference of Major Religious Superiors, Ireland October 25<sup>th</sup> 1989.

### **B.1.5 Presentations**

Conference on Alternatives in Education, 1988.

### **B.1.6 Miscellaneous**

Poster inviting parents to a meeting to "Save our School".



## **B.2 Visual data**

### **B.2.1 Photographs**

Photographs related to the 3 o'clock school.

Photographs related to the Adult Education classes/holidays.

### **B.2.2 Video footage**

SPACE Project.

Womens' Holiday, New Ross 1995

Womens' Holiday, Carna 1996

The 'Three o'clock school' party 1994

The 'Three o'clock school' holiday 1991

Newsround RTE, Playroom feature

Video of project made in 1987.

Video of school prior to renovation 1994

Video with older residents of Kileely 1991

Retirement of caretaker, Social gathering and presentation 1994

Video footage of host school and 'Three o'clock School' made by a friend of one of the 'Three o'clock School's' tutors, 1994.

## **B.3 Audio data**

### **B.3.1 Radio programmes**

Education Forum, Education needs in Limerick, 20.03.86.

Education Forum, The Three O' Clock School, 27.11.1986.

Kileely Community Project, Radio Luimni, 19<sup>th</sup> February 1988.

The Open Mind, Education for the 1990s, RTE 31st October 1989.

Open Mind, 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of KCP 1<sup>st</sup> October 1990



## **Appendix C      Profile of the Kileely estate 1985-2005**

### **C.1      Introduction**

In this appendix I profile the Kileely estate and compare it to neighbouring wards of Castle A and Castle B, both within the same parish. I also compare Kileely A to Limerick City as a whole. This longitudinal study spans the time period from 1985 when KCP was founded to 2005. The statistical data is enriched and validated by the voices of the research participants.

### **C.2      Background information**

The Kileely housing estate, comprising 368 terraced houses, was constructed in 1941 by Limerick Corporation. According to Fahey, ‘local authorities have been providing housing in Ireland since they came into existence a hundred years ago’, and furthermore local authority housing comprises over ‘30 percent of the present housing stock in Ireland’ (1999:3). Kileely estate is located within the PAUL Partnership area of St. Munchin’s.<sup>1</sup>The 368 terraced houses were built of mass concrete, each with a single cubicle toilet, and a single cold water tap in the kitchen. The original tenants came largely from the crowded tenements located near the city centre. Kileely estate, along with St. Mary’s Park, were the first large-scale local authority estates to be built by Limerick City Corporation.

Local folklore recalls that the new residents moved to the estate with meagre furniture and personal belongings, which were transported by handcarts, locally called box cars, and horse cars. This accommodation was far superior to the one and two-roomed tenements which they had vacated. However, the residents of this new estate had mixed feelings about it. Some felt that it was isolated, and located at a great distance from the city centre. One family actually moved back into the city as they found they were too isolated. Local folklore recounts that people from the city centre would walk out to Kileely on Sundays to view this new estate. The residents of this new estate, which formed the residential boundary on the north side of the city, used the nearby fields as garden plots to grow vegetables. These vegetable plots later became the

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<sup>1</sup>‘PAUL Partnership is an organisation made up of communities, state agencies, social partners, voluntary groups and elected representatives. PAUL works with local disadvantaged communities with the aim of promoting social inclusion and improving the quality of life for people living in these communities (Mc Cafferty, D. and Canny, A. 2005:13).

housing estate of Ballynanty. Housing was allocated on the basis of the living conditions by the housing officer with Limerick City Corporation.

The various roads through the estate were initially referred to solely by letters of the alphabet, e.g., G road, A road. The roads were later given formal names, but the old people in the area still refer to the roads in the original way. The children in the area attended Thomondgate National School, which was housed in what was later called the Unitas Hall, in nearby Thomondgate. Analysis of Roll books for the 1940s reveals that children were officially registered with addresses such as 26, G Road, Kileely. One of the original inhabitants recalled how the entire family slept downstairs for several months as the house seemed so large, having moved from single room accommodation in the city centre. Local folklore tells of people becoming disorientated within the estate and not being able to find their way home.<sup>2</sup>

Of course poverty was rife, and casual and seasonal employment was commonplace. Men queued at the docks for a single day's work. Visits to the pawn office acted as a type of banking system, offering credit during the week. Many stories of the poverty of the early years are still told by these first inhabitants. Oftentimes the men folk would not know that their good suit or shoes had been in the pawn office during the week. The suit and good shoes were of course Sunday mass attire. The secret of their 'visit' to the pawn office was revealed when they knelt down at mass, and the chalk numbers from the pawn office were in full view on the soles of their shoes.

The year the families moved to Kileely from the city tenements was a particularly hot summer. The story goes that poor quality sand was used in building the houses. The sand was said to be infested with fleas and residents sat outside on these warm balmy evening chatting to each other waiting for the fleas to 'calm down' in the cool of the evening before venturing inside to go to bed.

While some of the original inhabitants still survive within the estate, many of course have passed away. My own grandparents were among the first inhabitants of the estate. They moved to Kileely from a tenement in Market Alley, in the city. The descendants of these original inhabitants make up a significant proportion of the present population.

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<sup>2</sup> All the houses looked alike and exterior walls would not have been painted.

An infant school, St. Lelia's, was built in the area in 1945, and underwent refurbishment in the mid nineties. The area also had a handball alley, which was demolished in 1999, as it was in poor repair and deemed a site for anti social behaviour. The school and the handball alley, until its demise, were the only public buildings in the area. There are no green areas in the estate apart from the site on which the school is located.

Kileely has undergone positive changes over the years, houses have been refurbished, many have been bought from Limerick Corporation and tenants have made physical improvements such as new windows, bathrooms, and dry lining the mass concrete walls<sup>3</sup>.

This study also makes reference to the wards of Castle A and Castle B. Castle A and Castle B are located within St. Munchin's Parish, as is Kileely A. Castle A includes Shelbourne Road, Shelbourne Avenue, St. Munchin's Hospital and Farranshone. Castle B includes The Treasachs, Shelbourne Gardens, Bellfield Park, Priory Park, Clancy Strand, and Castle View Gardens. Both Castle A and Castle B are made up of private housing within the parish. The Kileely estate is bordered by the Limerick Corporation housing estates of Ballynanty and De Valera Park, and by the new Limerick Corporation housing developments in the Thomondgate area.

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<sup>3</sup> The houses were built of mass concrete, and as there was no insulation, the houses were damp. Many tenants dry lined the walls to create warmer and healthier homes. Limerick City corporation installed bathrooms in some houses in the 1990s. This was done by subdividing an existing bedroom.

### C.3 Demographic profile

**Table C.1 Population statistics for Kileely A 1981 to 2002**

Year	1981	1986	Decrease 1981- 1986	1991	Decrease 1981- 1991	1996	Decrease 1981- 1996	2002	Decrease 1981-2002
Males	937	816	12.9%	744	20.6%	767	18%	765	18%
Females	973	815	16.2%	753	22.6%	788	19%	794	19%
Total Population	1910	1631	14.6%	1497	21.6%	1555	19%	1559	18%

Table C.1 profiles the population of the area during the period of growth and development of the project. The highest recorded population was in 1981, and the subsequent census data record consistent decrease in population over the period of time.

The population of the Kileely A in 1981 was 1,910, comprising of 937 males and 973 females. By 1986 the population had decreased to 1,631 comprising of 816 males, and 815 females. This represents a 14.6% decrease in population between 1981 and 1986. The population of the area in 1991 was 1,497 with 744 males and 753 females, representing an overall decrease of 21.6% in population between 1981 and 1991. By 1996 the total population for the area was 1,555 with 767 males and 788 females. The overall population had decreased by 19% between 1981 and 1996. The 2002 census data record 1,559 persons in Kileely A of whom 765 were male and 794 were female. The decrease in population from 1981 was 18%.

**Table C.2 Analysis of demographic trends in the 15-64 age groups for Kileely A 1981 to 2002**

			Decrease 1981- 1986		Decrease 1981- 1991		Decrease 1981- 1996		Decrease 1981- 2002
Year	1981	1986		1991		1996		2002	
Males 15-64	565	530	6%	491	13%	498	12%	489	13%
Females 15-64	526	473	10%	469	11%	497	6%	522	1%

In the Limerick City Profile, Walsh et al. define per capita wealth creation with reference to a model developed by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. The model identifies four factors, upon which per capita wealth creation depends. These factors include productivity, employment rate, participation rate, and dependency rate. The participation rate measures ‘the percentage of the total number of persons of working age (16-65) that are in the labour force’ (Walsh et al. 2001:2). Table C.2 profiles the decrease in potential workers between 1981 and 2002 for Kileely A, and profiles a 13% decrease in males and 1% decrease in females for that time span.

Analysis of the population for Kileely A shows that 565 males in the 15 to 64 age group were living in Kileely A in 1981, and that this had decreased to 530 by 1986 representing a 6% decrease in the potential male working population over five years. There were 526 females in the age category 15-64 living in the Kileely A area in 1981, and this had reduced to 473 by 1986, representing a 10% decrease in the potential female working population over the same period. By 1991 the male population in the 15-64 age group was 491 representing a 13% decrease in population in comparison with the 1981 census. The female population for that age group in 1991 was 469 representing an 11% decrease in that category from the 1981 baseline. By 1996 the male population had decreased by 12% and the female population by 6% in comparison with the 1981 census data. According to the 2002 census the male population had decreased by 13% and the female by 1% in comparison with the 1981 census data.

Tables C.1 and C.2 above profile the decrease in population from 1981 to 2002. More specifically, Table C.2 profiles the decrease in the 15 to 64 age group which represents the potential working population. The 1980s was an era of mass emigration

and population decline. The leaching of the potential working population from any area has consequences for wealth creation.

#### C.4 Economic profile

This section outlines the economic profile of the study site both as a discrete entity and in comparison with other areas within the parish boundaries, namely the wards of Castle A and Castle B. I also draw comparisons between Kileely A and thus the Limerick City Borough. Census data informs this study in a number of ways. Firstly, census data which categorises persons by ‘present status’ in relation to their employment status is drawn upon as well as the division of population by ‘social class’. I also profile the economic dependency rate<sup>4</sup> which offers further insight into the economic profile of the population.

##### C.4.1 Economic status

**Table C.3 Categories of persons by ‘Present Economic Status’ for Kileely A for 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, and 2002**

Category	% of population aged over 15 in this category				
	1981	1986	1991	1996	2002
At Work	35.94	30.15%	32.20	36.65	40.48%
Seeking 1 <sup>st</sup> Job	1.29	4.56%	3.91	6.43	2.32%
Unemployed	12.71	16.27%	17.34%	10.48%	9.47%
Student	4.87	6.84%	7.30	7.4	9.04%
Home duties	31.07	28.71%	25.18	23.52	17.65%
Retired	8.45	7.60%	8	7.31	8.87%
Disabled /Unable	5.64	5.83	5.96	8.10	11.45%
Other	0	0	0.08	0.08	0.68%

<sup>4</sup> The economic dependency rate is calculated by quantifying the ratio of the number of economically inactive persons, (unemployed, children less than 15 years, retired, first time job seekers, students, persons engaged in home duties and “others”) to every person at work. This ratio between those at work and all others is a useful indicator. However, the types of work and income levels of those at work is not referred to, but reference to the social class status will elucidate this phenomena to some extent. However, this too has its limitations as social class status categorises all persons aged 15 and over, and not just employed persons.



In Kileely A, in 1981 there were only 472 people in paid employment representing 35.94% of the 15+ population. This had decreased to 30.15% by 1986. It showed an improvement of 2% in the 1991 census. It reverted to 36.65% in 1996, and increased to 40.48% in 2002. Table C.3 shows an increase of five percentage points over this period, and significantly an increase of over 10% in the employment rate recorded for the mid 1980s when the project was founded and again in the early years of the millennium. In 1981, 1.29% of the population were seeking jobs for the first time. This steadily increased to 6.43% in 1996, and decreased to 2.32% in 2002. The unemployment figures for this period are very stark. The unemployment level in 1981 was 12.71 %, and it increased in 1986 to 16.27%, and to 17.34% 1991. According to the 1996 census it decreased to 10.48%, and the 2002 census records 9.74 % unemployment in the Kileely A ward. The percentage of people at work was at the lowest level in mid eighties, and early nineties, and the percentage of people unemployed was at its highest in the mid eighties and lowest in the early years of the millennium.

The mid to late eighties and early nineties was a time of severe unemployment, not only in this area but throughout Ireland. According to Nolan, ‘...there was little or no economic growth from 1980 to 1987, as the government struggled to bring public finances under control’ (2001:246). He goes further in his analysis of that time period, stating that ‘the dramatic rise in unemployment between 1980 and 1987 pushed many households with children into relative income poverty’ (2001:252).

I would ask the reader to recall that the census data for the Kileely A ward is not specific to the Kileely estate but also includes private housing areas within the ward. I would therefore contend that the unemployment levels for the discrete estate itself might very well be higher than the above table would indicate. The following table depicts the number of individuals involved in home duties. These people are dependent on other earners in the household or on social welfare.

**Table C.4 Classification of present economic status: Engagement in home duties for Kileely A for 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, and 2002**

Year	Total number of persons in 15+ age group	Total number of persons classified as engaged in home duties	% of population 15+ in this category	Total number of males classified as engaged in home duties	Total number of females classified as engaged in home duties
1981	1313	408	31.07%		
1986	1186	340	28.71%	0	340
1991	1124	283	25.18%	0	283
1996	1135	267	23.52%	2	265
2002	1141	205	17.96%	3	202

The 1981 census does not offer a gender breakdown on persons classified as ‘engaged in home duties’. According to the 1986 Kileely A ward census, there were 340 persons aged 15+ engaged in home duties, all of these were female. In 1991, 25.18% of 15+ population were engaged in home duties, 23.52% in 1996, and 17.96% in 2002. For the first time the 1996 census recorded 2 males ‘engaged in home duties’. Thus, the census would indicate that engagement in home duties is a female domain with a high percentage of the female population within this category. In the five periods outlined above, the percentage of persons engaged in home duties decreased steadily from 31.07% in 1981 to 17.96% in 2002. This indicates a less dependent profile.

In order to place Kileely A, within a parish and city wide context I now compare Kileely A with Castle A and Castle B, and with Limerick City Borough for the years 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, and 2002.

**Table C.5 Comparison of persons over 15 by ‘present economic status’ for Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City Borough for 1981**

Category	% Kileely A population aged over 15 in this category 1981	% Castle A population aged over 15 in this category 1981	% Castle B population aged over 15 in this category 1981	% Limerick City Borough population aged over 15 in this category” 1981
At Work	35.94	47.21	52.64	44.17
Seeking 1 <sup>st</sup> Job	1.29	0.16	0.19	1.05
Unemployed	12.71	2.28	2.54	6.43
Student	4.87	12.24	11.15	9.55
Home duties	31.07	31.08	22.11	26.65
Retired	8.45	4.98	9.78	6.74
Disabled /Unable to work	5.64	2.02	1.56	4.98
Other		0	0	0.40

**Table C.6 Comparison of persons over 15 by ‘present economic status’ for Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City Borough for 1986**

Category	% Kileely A population aged over 15 in this category 1981	% Castle A population aged over 15 in this category 1981	% Castle B population aged over 15 in this category 1981	% Limerick City Borough population aged over 15 in this category 1981
At Work	30.13	47.18	51.05	39.00
Seeking 1 <sup>st</sup> Job	4.55	0.92	1.05	2.59
Unemployed	16.27	3.87	3.78	10.51
Student	6.82	10.80	11.55	10.67
Home duties	28.66	26.86	18.90	23.71
Retired	7.58	8.67	11.34	7.54
Disabled /Unable to work	5.81	1.66	2.31	5.26
Other	0	0		

**Table C.7 Comparison of persons over 15 by ‘present economic status’ for Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City Borough for 1991**

Category	% Kileely A population aged over 15 in this category 1991	% Castle A population aged over 15 in this category 1991	% Castle B population aged over 15 in this category 1991	% Limerick City Borough population aged over 15 in this category 1991
At Work	32.20	43.79	46.38	38.31
Seeking 1 <sup>st</sup> Job	3.91	0.78	0.65	2.04
Unemployed	17.34	5.96	8.31	10.96
Student	7.30	11.92	8.31	11.45
Home duties	25.18	24.04	17.28	21.77
Retired	8	11.73	15.97	9.87
Disabled /Unable to work	5.96	1.75	3.060	5.05
Other	0.08	0	0	0.52

**Table C.8 Comparison of persons over 15 by ‘present economic status’ for Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City Borough 1996**

Category	% Kileely A population aged over 15 in this category 1991	% Castle A population aged over 15 in this category 1991	% Castle B population aged over 15 in this category 1991	% Limerick City Borough population aged over 15 in this category 1991
At Work	36.35	51.96	51.91	42.01
Seeking 1 <sup>st</sup> Job	6.43	0.71	0.21	1.83
Unemployed	10.48	5.25	4.04	9.29
Student	7.40	11.76	10.42	12.38
Home duties	23.52	17.73	16.17	20.09
Retired	7.31	10.51	14.68	9.40
Disabled /Unable to work	8.10	2.04	2.34	4.60
Other	0.09	0	0	0.36

**Table C.9 Comparison of persons over 15 by ‘present economic status’ for Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City Borough 2002**

Category	% Kileely A population aged over 15 in this category 2002	% Castle A population aged over 15 in this category 2002	% Castle B population aged over 15 in this category 2002	% Limerick City Borough population aged over 15 in this category 2002
At Work	40.48	49.82	48.88	47.41
Seeking 1 <sup>st</sup> Job	2.32	0.44	0.45	1.12
Unemployed	9.47	3.87	1.79	6.52
Student	9.04	10.83	9.82	12.24
Home duties	17.65	16.20	12.72	13.27
Retired	8.87	12.06	21.21	10.60
Disabled /Unable to work	11.45	5.28	4.69	7.42
Other	0.68	1.50	0.45	1.43

In tables C.5, C.6, C.7, C.8 and C.9 I draw on census data to compare the ‘present economic status’ of persons living in Kileely A, with persons living in Castle A and Castle B, and the Limerick City Borough for the years 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, and 2002. In 1981 36% of the Kileely A area were ‘at work’. This compared negatively with the other three areas where 47%, 53% and 44% were recorded as ‘at work’. In 1986 Kileely A had 30.13% of its population at work in comparison with 47.18% and 51.05% for Castle A and Castle B respectively. Limerick City recorded an employment level of 39% for the same period. In 1991 Kileely A had 32% of its population ‘at work’, whereas Castle A had 44%, Castle B had 46%, and Limerick City had 38%. In 1996 Kileely A had 36.35% of its population ‘at work’, the corresponding figures for Castle A and Castle B were 51.96% and 51.91% respectively, and Limerick City recorded 42% of its population at work. In 2002 Kileely A had 40.48% of its population over 15 years old at work, this compared with 49.82% for Castle A, 48.88% for Castle B and 47.41% for Limerick. Thus, throughout the period of increased employment and indeed a period of unprecedented growth in the Irish economy, Kileely A maintained a significant negative differential in the percentage of its population in the work force.

In 1981 the Kileely A ward had an unemployment rate of 12.71%, which compared negatively with Castle A and B which exhibited rates of 2.28% and 2.54% respectively. The corresponding figure for Limerick City was 6.43%. In 1986 Kileely A had increased its already high unemployment rate to 16.27%, yet again increasing

the gap between itself and Castle A and Castle B which recorded 3.87% and 3.78% respectively. The unemployment rate for Limerick City was 10.51%. By 1991 Kileely A had an unemployment rate of 17.34% which remained substantially higher than Limerick City which was 10.94%, and the neighbouring wards of Castle A and Castle B which were 5.96% and 8.31% respectively. In 1996 the unemployment rate for Kileely A was 10.48%, the corresponding rates for Castle A and Castle B were 5.25% and 4.04% respectively while the rate for Limerick City as was 9.29%. By 2002, the unemployment rate in Kileely A, had decreased to 9.47%, however, it still compared negatively with the neighbouring wards of Castle A and Castle B which had rates of 3.87% and 1.79% respectively. The 2002 Limerick City unemployment rate was 6.52%. Kileely A still exhibited almost twice the city average unemployment rate. Kileely A consistently exhibited very high unemployment rates during the twenty years profiled above.

#### **C.4.2 Social class**

Census data is coded in a variety of ways, including a ‘social class’ category. Analysis of the social class categories in the 1986,1991, 1996, and 2002 census offers further insight into the profile of the community being studied.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Key:

Social class 1: Higher Professional, higher managerial, proprietors employing others and farmers farming 200 or more acres.

Social class 2: Lower professional, lower managerial, proprietors without employees and farmers farming 100-199 acres.

Social class 3: Other non-manual and farmers farming 50-99 acres.

Social class 4: Skilled manual and farmers farming 30-49 acres

Social class 5; semi skilled manual and farmers farming less than 30 acres

Social class 6: unskilled manual

Social class 7: Unknown

**Table C.10 Social class breakdown for Kileely A for 1986, 1991, 1996 and 2002**

	% Kileely A population by social class category in 1986	% Kileely A population by social class category in 1991	% Kileely A population by social class category in 1996	% Kileely A population by social class category in 2002
Social class 1	1.34	1.33	0.51	0.83%
Social class 2	4.23	3.27	6.49	7.44%
Social class 3	10.72	9.35	12.47	12.25%
Social class 4	23.97	22.44	24.30	20.97%
Social class 5	24.70	25.98	20.96	18.85%
Social class 6	22.25	24.58	15.69	17.25%
Unclassified 7	13.24	13.02	19.54	22.38%

Note: the 1981 census does not categorise the population into social class

Table C.10. above profiles the social class categories into which the population for Kileely A can be divided for 1986, 1991,1996 and 2002. Persons aged 15 and over are categorised by occupation, unemployed or retired persons are classified by their former occupation.<sup>6</sup>

Higher and lower professionals are represented by Social class 1 and 2, and only 5.57% of the Kileely A population fell within these categories in 1986. This declined to 4.6% in 1991, it increased to 7% by 1996, and continued to increase to 8.27% in 2002. This indicates a steady increase in social class 1 and 2 over the period. Social class 5 and 6, which denote the semi skilled manual and unskilled manual accounted for 46.95% of the population in 1986, 50.56% in 1991, 35.98% in 1996 and 36.1% in 2002.

The following tables compare Kileely A with Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City Borough, for 1986, 1991, and 2002<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Census 1991- small area population statistics , Contents and key to abbreviations page 6

<sup>7</sup> Since the 1981 census does not offer data on social class I have substituted this with data from the 1986 census

**Table C.11 Comparison of persons by social class for Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City 1986**

	% Kileely A population in this category	% Castle A population in this category	% Castle B population in this category	% Limerick City Borough population in this category
Social class 1	1.34	12.20	17.57	8.48
Social class 2	4.23	16.71	23.36	10.17
Social class 3	10.72	22.21	22.05	16.19
Social class 4	23.97	16.92	13.46	21.93
Social class 5	24.70	12.34	11.96	19.46
Social class 6	22.25	1.76	0.75	10.36
Social class 7	13.24	17.84	10.84	13.75

**Table C.12 Comparison of persons by social class for Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City 1991**

	% Kileely A population in this category	% Castle A population in this category	% Castle B population in this category	% Limerick City Borough population in this category
Social class 1	1.33	13.58	17.34	8.88
Social class 2	3.27	16.41	22.80	9.88
Social class 3	9.35	21.37	22.80	15.60
Social class 4	22.44	13.74	9.35	18.99
Social class 5	25.98	11.90	11.11	18.30
Social class 6	24.58	5.26	4.09	11.66
Social class 7	13.02	17.70	12.47	16.67
Total				



**Table C.13 Comparison of persons by social class for Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City 2002**

	% Kileely A population in this category	% Castle A population in this category	% Castle B population in this category	% Limerick City Borough population in this category
Social class 1	0.83	6.95	8.66	4.79
Social class 2	7.44	24.78	31.30	16.82
Social class 3	12.25	19.67	18.31	15.61
Social class 4	20.97	16.27	12.40	16.58
Social class 5	18.85	11.46	9.06	14.52
Social class 6	17.25	2.81	1.77	6.80
Social class 7	22.38	18.05	18.50	23.04
Total				

In 1986, 5.57% of the population of Kileely A fell into social class 1 and 2. In Castle A and B the corresponding figures were, 28.91% and 40.93% respectively. The figure for Limerick City was 18.65%. Thus both higher and lower professionals were significantly under-represented in Kileely A. An analysis of social class 5 and 6 which represents semi skilled and manual workers, reveals that 46.95% of the population fell into this category in stark comparison to 14.10% and 12.71% for Castle A and Castle B respectively. The corresponding figure for Limerick City was 29.82%. This figure again represents a significant over-representation of people in this category.

In 1991, 4.6% of the population of Kileely A fell into social class 1 and 2. In Castle A, located within the same parish, 29.99% of the population fell within this category as did 40.14% of Castle B ward. Within Limerick City the corresponding figure was 18.76%. Therefore the higher and lower professionals were again significantly under represented in the population of Kileely A. An analysis of the population for social class 5 and 6, which comprises semi skilled and manual workers, reveals the following divisions between wards. As mentioned previously 50.56% of the population of Kileely A fell into social class 5 and 6. The corresponding figures for Castle A were 17.16%, Castle B 15.2%, and 29.96% for the city as a whole, once again revealing an over-representation in these categories.

In 2002, 8.27% of Kileely A fell into social class 1 and 2, which represents a significant increase from 4.6% in 1991. The corresponding statistics for Castle A and Castle B were 31.73% and 39.96% respectively. The corresponding figure for Limerick City was 21.61%. Yet again the higher and lower professionals were significantly under represented in the Kileely A ward. Population analysis for social class 5 and 6 reveals 36.10% of the population of Kileely A fell into social class categories 5 and 6. The corresponding figures for Castle A were 14.27%, Castle B 10.83%, and 21.32% for the city as a whole.

Thus throughout the period of this study the Kileely A area had a disproportionate percentage of its population in the upper and lower social class categories, with over representation within the unskilled and semi skilled categories and under representation within the higher and lower professional categories.

#### **C.4.3 Economic Dependency Rate (EDR)**

The economic dependency rate is the ratio of people not at work to others within the population who are at work. The ‘not at work’ population include students, retired people, people engaged in home duties, unemployed, children less than 15, first time job seekers and those classified as ‘others’.

**Table C.14 Economic dependency ratio for Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City 1981**

	Total population	At work	Not at work	Economic dependency ratio
Kileely A	1910	472	1438	3.04
Castle A	1574	559	1015	1.81
Castle B	617	269	348	1.29
Limerick City	60736	18767	41969	2.23

**Table C.15 Economic dependency ratio for Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City 1991**

	Total population	At work	Not at work	Economic dependency ratio
Kileely A	1497	362	1135	3.135
Castle A	1310	448	862	1.924
Castle B	513	212	301	1.49
Limerick City Borough	52038	15180	36858	2.42

**Table C.16 Economic dependency ratio for Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City 2002**

	Total population	At work	Not at work	Economic dependency ratio
Kileely A	1559	470	1089	2.31
Castle A	1352	566	786	1.38
Castle B	508	219	289	1.31
Limerick City Borough	54023	20648	33383	1.61

Tables C.14, C. 15, and C.16 profile the economic dependency rate for Kileely A and for Castle A and Castle B, both residential areas within St. Munchin’s Parish, and for Limerick City for 1981, 1996, and 2002. The higher the dependency rate, the greater the degree of economic dependence. In all tables, Kileely A consistently shows the highest level of economic dependency. Thus, each employed person in Kileely A, has a higher number of people dependent on them than an employed person in the other three areas profiled.

Tables C.11, C.12 and C.13 profile the social class comparisons between Kileely A and the other three areas for 1986, 1991 and 2002. While there is no measure of income, it is reasonable to conclude that since Kileely A has a high economic dependency ratio and poor representation within the higher skilled social class categories, that not only has each working person in Kileely A more people to support, but they may very well have less income proportionally to do so.

The economic profile of Kileely A profiled the ‘present status’, ‘social class’ and ‘economic dependency ratio’ of the population of the Kileely A ward. Furthermore, it compared Kileely A to other areas within the parish and to the city as a whole.

Kileely A emerged as an area of high unemployment, disproportionate representation within the higher and lower social class groupings, and a high economic dependency rate. And while these statistics are stark, I believe the reality is more severe, due to the fact that, as previously discussed, Kileely A Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS) include areas of private housing as well as the Kileely estate.

All the above are indicative of an area experiencing both income poverty and marginalisation within both the parish area, and the city as a whole. Material deprivation and poverty not only have an effect on the day to day lived experiences of people experiencing these phenomena, but can also have long term effects in that they impact on the lives of children, both within the home in terms of lack of resources, and social capital, and beyond the home, into the school life of children.

There is evidence from many studies of a negative association between material deprivation and the inclination, resources, and capacity of parents to encourage and help their children succeed at school (Garner and Raudenbush, 1991; Mortimore and Blackstone, 1982; Willms, 1986) (Kellaghan et al.1995:31).

## **C.5 Education profile**

This section examines the educational profile of the area through analysis of the 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996 and 2002 census data. In section 4 I discussed the economic profile of the area, and compared it to neighbouring wards within the same parish and to the city as a whole. Likewise in this chapter I compare the educational profile of Kileely A with that of Castle A and B and Limerick City Borough.

Hasse contends that ‘the social class composition of an area’ is closely related to ‘its levels of educational attainment’ (Hasse, 1999:28). In the previous section I examined the social class composition of Kileely A and noted a disproportionate percentage of its population are represented in the upper and lower social class categories, with over representation within the unskilled and semi skilled categories and under representation within the higher and lower professional categories.

Hasse measures educational attainment either by school leaving age, or educational qualifications obtained. An analysis of the census data offers an insight into the educational attainment profile of the inhabitants of the area. I want to make it clear that I am in no way stigmatising people who have not succeeded within the system, nor am I in any way making a judgement on why they have not succeeded

academically, nor am I denigrating informal learning in any way. I wish to acknowledge and respect all learning which people have attained. Formal learning however, is accredited, measurable, and recorded by the census. Accredited learning acts as a gateway to employment and further educational opportunities. Achievement within the education system offers potential for economic and social mobility.

According to Nolan et al. 'the education system in the absence of counter measures, can reproduce inequalities and poverty. However, the education system has a key role to play in providing a route out of poverty (Nolan et al., 1998:xxi). Simply stated, educational attainment affects access to certain types of job opportunities, and there is a close link between job opportunities and income. Kellaghan et al. contend that:

There is considerable evidence to support the view that students who leave school having taken no public examination or having obtained poor results on a junior cycle examination are poorly placed in the labour force (Hannan,1986; Hannan et al., 1991, Smyth and Surridge,1995) (1995:44).

Of course there are always exceptions like the entrepreneurs we hear about who left school at 15 and set up supermarket chains or airlines. But for those who do not have wealth to inherit, and who need to make their own way in the world, success in the education system is closely linked to job opportunities and social mobility.

According to Mc Cafferty 'educational achievement in turn is widely recognised as a key factor in determining the individual's labour market prospects' (1999:210).

The Conference of Major Religious Superiors has been very active in the issue of combating educational disadvantage for over two decades. Their publication, 'Education and Poverty, *'Eliminating Disadvantage in the Primary School Years'*, concur with all the above, stating that 'education qualifications (or the lack of them) determine to a large extent the life chances of young people', (1992: xvi). I will now excavate the educational profile for Kileely A, bearing in mind Hasse's definition, which is inclusive of school leaving age or educational qualifications obtained (1999:28).

**Table C.17 Education profile for Kileely A 1981: categorised by highest level of educational establishment attended and by age**

Age group	% whose education ceased at Primary	% whose education ceased at Secondary	% whose education ceased at Vocational	% whose education ceased at Secondary and Vocational	% whose education ceased at Higher level	% Not stated	Total
15-29	32%	30.5%	23.84%	11.57	0.93%	0.93%	432
30-44	48.5	10.09	31.86	7.57	0.34	1.58	317
45-59	66.81	12.38	16.37	3.54	0	0.88	226
60+	85.40	6.93	6.20	0.72	0.36	0.36	274

According to the 1981 Census, ‘Persons who have completed their full-time education are classified by the highest level of educational establishment attended full time and by their age group’.<sup>8</sup>

The 1981 census data offers limited information in comparison with subsequent census data. Table C.17 categorises persons according to highest level of educational establishment attended, but no reference is made to educational attainment. Therefore a person might be recorded as having attended secondary school but there is no information on attainment.

According to Table C.17, 32% of the 15-29 year old population ceased formal education at Primary level, 30% at Secondary level, 23.84% at Vocational level, 11.57% at secondary and vocational level, and 0.93 at higher level. These 15 to 29 year olds are part of the generation of “free secondary” education, and yet 32% did not transfer to secondary level. Within this age category 66% went on to some form of second level education, secondary, or /and vocational. However, as already pointed out, the census data does not contain information on attainment levels, nor how long students remained within the secondary level system. A mere 0.93% of the population, representing 4 people, went on to third level.

<sup>8</sup> Census of Population, 1981 Key to Abbreviations used in the Computer Printouts for small area statistics, Central Statistics Office, page 7. Categories include Primary, Secondary, Vocational, Secondary and Vocational, Higher level and Not stated

In 1981, the 30 to 44 age group has a total population of 317, of these 48.50% ceased formal education at primary level, 10.09% at secondary level, 31.86% at vocational level, 7.57% at secondary/vocational level 0.34% at a higher level, presumably third level, and 1.58% did not state the level at which they ceased education. It is reasonable to assume that this population group represents the parents of primary and secondary school children.

An even more dismal picture emerges the 45-59 year old age group which might also represent parents of young people of secondary school age. There are 226 people in this age category of whom 66.81% ceased formal education at primary level, 12.38% at secondary level, 16.37% at vocational level, 3.54% at secondary and vocational, and none at higher level.

Analysis of the 60+ age group reveals 85.4% of people left school at primary level, 6.93% at secondary level, 6.20% at vocational level, 0.72% at secondary and vocational and 0.36% at higher level. On a positive note, it is encouraging to see that there was a decrease from 85.4% in the 60+ age group to 32% in the 15-29 age group of population who left school at primary level.

Early school leaving and lack of educational attainment have implications not only directly for the individuals involved but also in terms of building the educational capacity within the home and within the community. Levels of parental educational attainment, particularly the mother's level of educational attainment, can have consequences for the children within the family, as Kellaghan et al. note:

...the strongest predictors of disadvantage based on their relationship to school performance would appear to be the quality of the educational environment provided in the home,(home atmosphere) the level of education attained by the mother, and measures of relative poverty (e.g. not owning one's house, possessing a medical card) (1995:41).

Poor educational attainment within the educational system not only has consequences for those directly concerned but indeed for future generations. Children whose parents ceased education at primary school age are in a less advantageous position to support their own children academically through secondary school years, in comparison with parents who have succeeded and been rewarded for that success within the system.

**Table C.18 Education profile for persons aged 15 and over: Kileely A 1986**

	Male	Female	Total	
Still at school	39	42	81	6.28%
Under 15	214	215	429	36.17%
15	103	99	202	17.03%
16	140	129	269	22.68%
17	50	34	84	7.08%
18	17	33	50	4.21%
19	4	2	6	0.50%
20	4	0	4	0.33%
21 and over	3	4	7	0.59%
Not stated	21	33	54	4.55%

The 1986 census offers data on the age and gender of the person when full time education ceased.<sup>9</sup> The 1986 census data differs from the 1981 census in a number of ways. Firstly, the 1986 data offers a gender profile, which the 1981 does not. Secondly it offers information strictly on the age at which people ceased full time education, rather than by highest level of educational establishment attended. This offers the opportunity to deduce probable educational attainment levels. Thirdly, unlike the 1981 data, the 1986 census does not offer an age profile of persons who left school at various ages, for example, according to Table C.18 we know that 22.68% of persons left school at 16 but we do not know the age profile of those persons at the time of data collection. In analysing the 1981 census, it was possible to track the differences between discrete age cohorts in terms of when they left formal education. It is not possible to do so with the 1986 data.

In 1986 there were 1186 persons in the 15+ population in the Kileely A ward. Of the 1186 persons in this category, 81 or 6.28% were still at school, 36% had ceased full time education under 15, 17.03% at 15 years old, 22.68% at 16 years old, 7.08% at 17 years old, 4.21% at 18 years old, 1.60% at 19 years old 0.33% at 20 years old and 0.59% at 21 years old. A staggering 76% had ceased education by the time they were 16 years old. This is indicative of a culture of early school leaving.

This point is made clearly in the discussion paper of the Education Commission of the conference of major religious superiors:

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<sup>9</sup> Census of Population, 1986 Key to Abbreviations used in the Computer Printouts for small area statistics, Central Statistics Office, page 7



Education plays an indirect but important part in the perpetuation of poverty. A reasonable standard of living and status in society are dependent on having a job. At the present time employment prospects are determined to a very large extent, by educational qualifications (Conference of Major Religious Superiors, 1992:1).

**Table C.19 Comparative education profile, persons aged 15+, for Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City for 1986**

Category	Kileely A % population aged 15+ education profile	Castle A % population aged 15+ education profile	Castle B % population aged 15+ education profile	Limerick City Borough % population aged 15+ education profile
Still at school	6.82	10.80	11.55	10.67
Left school under 15	36.17	7.66	5.88	19.29
Left school at 15	17.03	5.63	5.67	12.14
Left school at 16	22.68	16.98	13.86	18.94
Left school at 17	7.08	15.97	15.12	10.99
Left school at 18	4.21	18.55	23.52	12.68
Left school at 19	1.60	3.69	4.83	2.68
Left school at 20	0.33	2.40	0.21	1.59
Left school at 21 and over	0.59	8.49	11.76	4.88
Not stated	4.55	9.78	5.46	6.10

Table C.19 compares Kileely A with Limerick City Borough as a whole. According to the above Table C 36.17% of the young persons living in the Kileely A had left school under 15, in comparison with 18.19% for Limerick City Borough as a whole. Therefore, a young person under the age of 15 living in Kileely A in 1986 was twice as likely to leave the formal educational system. Furthermore, if we combine the categories ‘left school under 15 ‘and ‘left school at 15’ for the Kileely A area we note that this represents 53.2 % of the population compared with 29.63 % of the population for Limerick Borough as a whole. If we combine the categories left school under 15, at 15 and at 16 we note that 75.88% of young people had left the formal educational system in Kileely A while 47.49% had left the system for Limerick City Borough as a whole.

In 1986, the percentage of people within the educational system at the age of 18 for the city as a whole was almost 12%. The corresponding figure for Kileely A was only 4.21%. Therefore a person living in Kileely A was three times more likely to be outside the educational system by the age of 18. We do not have specific data

concerning Junior (Intermediate) or Leaving Certificate attainment for Kileely A, but it is reasonable to assume that the early school leaving age, even for those who transferred to secondary school, meant they did not complete Junior or Leaving certificate state exams. If we assume that people who left school at or before 17 had not completed Leaving Certificate, we learn that 984 of the 1186 representing 82.96 % of the population of Kileely A in 1986 did not complete second level education. This again compares unfavourably with the city as a whole where 67.94% of the population left school at or before the age of 17.

Only 17 respondents in Kileely A said they ceased formal education at 19, 20 or 21+ representing 1.43 % of the population who attended some sort of Post Leaving Certificate studies or training. The corresponding statistic for Limerick City as a whole is 8.57%. According to these figures a person living in Limerick City Borough was 6 times more likely to attend some type of educational training from the age of 19 onwards. Analysis of 1986 data portrays Kileely A as a community with poor educational retention and low educational achievement.

Both the 1991 and 1996 census adopt the category “age education ceased” for the population aged over 15 years. Furthermore, analysis of the 1991 census also offers an insight into the link between education and work, by classifying persons “by the highest level of education (full-time or part – time) which was completed and by present status i.e. at work etc.”<sup>10</sup> This affords the opportunity to explore possible relationships between variables not possible in the previous census data of 1981 and 1986.

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<sup>10</sup> Census of Population, 1991 Key to Abbreviations used in the Computer Printouts for small area statistics, Central Statistics Office, page 7

**Table C.20 Comparative education profile, persons aged 15+, Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City 1991**

Category	Kileely A % of population aged 15+	Castle A % of population aged 15+	Castle B % of population aged 15+	Limerick City Borough % of population aged 15+
Still at school	7.29	11.92	8.31	11.45
Left school under 15	37.36	10.85	7.22	20.62
Left school at 15	17.70	6.45	5.47	11.76
Left school at 16	17.79	16.03	17.50	17.24
Left school at 17	10.14	17.88	15.75	10.59
Left school at 18	64.00	12.12	21.88	11.91
Left school at 19	0.62	3.71	3.50	2.46
Left school at 20	0.08	2.44	1.75	1.42
Left school at 21 and over	0.44	8.01	8.97	5.36
Not stated	1.95	10.55	9.62	7.14
Total				

Table C.20 presents a comparative analysis of the age at which persons left school. As with the 1986 census there are limitations in drawing conclusions since the age profile of persons is not stated. So, for example, we know that 17.7% of people in Kileely A had left school by age 15 but we do not know the age profile of those persons at the time of the census. However, the figures indicate a culture of non retention within the system.

Kileely A yet again compares negatively with the other wards, most particularly with its nearby neighbours in Castle A and B. If the categories left school under 15, at 15 and at 16 are combined we learn that 72.85% of people in Kileely A fit into this combined category as against only 33.33% for Castle A, 30.13% for Castle B and 49.62% for Limerick City Borough. Thus the likelihood of a person leaving the educational system is significantly higher for persons living in Kileely A.

The 1991 census data provides an insight into the relationship between the ‘age full time education ceased’ and ‘present status’. This for the first time allows an exploration of the relationship between educational attainment and position within the work force<sup>11</sup>.

**Table C.21 Males aged 15 and over whose full- time education has ceased are classified by the highest level of education completed (full-time or part- time) and by present status Kileely A 1991**

Highest level of education	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	x	y	Not stated
Males 15+ at work	0	80	70	25	28	10	2	1	0	0	0	5
Males 15+ looking for 1 <sup>st</sup> job	0	12	11	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Males 15+unemployed	0	98	33	7	5	0	1	1	1	0	0	3
total	0	190	114	35	35	10	3	2	1	0	0	8

Table C.21 profiles males over the age of 15 whose full time education has ceased. Note that 80 of the males (42%)with Primary education are at work but 110 (56%) males with Primary education are either looking for their first job or unemployed. This would indicate a link between low educational qualifications employment prospects. In category 3, which relates to lower secondary education, we note that 70 (61%) are working and 44 (39%) are either seeking employment or unemployed. This indicates that with a higher level of educational attainment the probability of being unemployed decreased. Category 5 relates to attainment of Leaving Certificate, and 71% of people with leaving certificate are employed. The above table would indicate that the higher the educational attainment, the higher the chances of gaining employment.

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<sup>11</sup> Key

- 1.No formal education
- 2.Primary education
- 3.Lower secondary education( Intermediate Cert, Group Cert, O levels) Upper Secondary,
- 4.Technical or vocational
- 5.Leaving Cert
- 6.Both technical/vocational course and Leaving Cert

Third level

- 7. Sub degree qualification
- 8.Primary University degree
- 9 Professional qualification ( of degree status at least)
- X.Both a degree and professional qualification
- Y Post- graduate degree

**Table C.22 Females aged 15 and over whose full- time education has ceased are classified by the highest level of education completed (full-time or part- time) and by present status Kileely A 1991**

Highest level of education	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	x	y	Not stated
females 15+ at work	0	44	38	10	34	6	0	5	0	0	0	4
females 15+ looking for 1 <sup>st</sup> job	0	6	2	1	5	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
females 15+unemployed	0	20	16	3	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	70	56	14	45	8	1	5	0	0	0	4

Table C.22 profiles females over the age of 15 whose full time education has ceased. Of the 70 females with primary education, 62% were at work and 38% were either looking for their first job or unemployed. This differs from the male profile, where the percentage of unemployed males was greater for category 2. In analysing category 3, which relates to lower secondary education, we note that 46% of women are at work and 54% are either looking for their first job or unemployed. Category 5 relates to 'Leaving Certificate', and people with leaving cert have a 75% chance of being in the work force. The highest level of engagement in the workforce was for females with Leaving Certificate qualifications. Anecdotal evidence and interview data would indicate that the types of work women engaged in outside the home are in the low paid sector.

**Table C.23 Comparative education profile, persons aged 15+, Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City 1996**

Category	Kileely A % of population aged 15+	Castle A % of population aged 15+	Castle B % of population aged 15+	Limerick City Borough % of population aged 15+
Still at school	7.4	11.76	10.42	12.38
Left school under 15	31.80	7.04	6.80	18.79
Left school at 15	12.68	5.70	5.31	9.94
Left school at 16	24.31	15.41	11.27	15.79
Left school at 17	9.69	14.61	14.46	11.44
Left school at 18	8.54	18.62	21.27	13.53
Left school at 19	1.58	5.61	4.89	3.34
Left school at 20	0.61	3.65	4.25	2.23
Left school at 21 and over	2.02	14.17	16.59	8.69
Not stated	1.32	3.38	4.68	3.82
Total				

Table C.23 profiles the age at which education ceased for persons 15 and over for Kileely A, Castle A and Castle B and the Limerick City Borough in 1996. According to the above table 68.79% of the Kileely A population had ceased education by the age of 16. This had decreased from the 72.85% of 1991. The percentage of the population leaving school on or before 16 for Castle A was 28.15%, and for Castle B was 23.38% and for the Limerick City Borough was 44.52%. Yet again Kileely A scores very negatively in terms of retention of the population within the educational system, not only with neighbouring wards but with the city as a whole.

Tables 24 and 25 profiles the link between present status and level of educational attainment.

**Table C.24 Males aged 15 and over whose full- time education has ceased are classified by the highest level of education completed (full-time or part- time) and by present status Kileely A 1996**

Highest level of education	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	x	y	Not stated	Total
Males 15+ at work	0	81	87	13	39	3	14	1	0	0	0	2	240
Males 15+ looking for 1 <sup>st</sup> job	1	28	17	1	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	53
Males 15+unemployed	0	47	22	1	7	4	3	1	0	1	0	2	88
Not in labour force	1	95	17	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	129
Total	2	251	143	19	52	8	17	3	0	1	0	14	510

In 1996, 32.27% of the male population who had left school at primary level were at work, at the same time 60.83% of those who had lower secondary education were employed, and 68.42% of those with Leaving Certificate were employed. The above table would indicate that the greater the level of educational attainment, the greater the probability of being employed.

**Table C.25 Females aged 15 and over whose full- time education has ceased are classified by the highest level of education completed (full-time or part- time) and by present status Kileely A 1996**

Highest level of education	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	x	y	Not stated	Total
females 15+ at work	0	50	51	9	37	5	20	2	0	1	0	1	176
females 15+ looking for 1 <sup>st</sup> job	0	5	14	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
females 15+unemployed	0	8	11	1	7	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	31
Not in labour force	0	216	58	15	15	1	2	0	0	0	0	7	314
Total	0	279	134	25	60	7	23	2	0	1	0	10	541

In 1996 17.92% of females who had completed their education at primary level were in employment, 38% who had completed lower secondary level were employed and 61% of those who had completed their Leaving certificate. So, as with their male counterparts, the longer females stayed within the educational system the greater their chances of being employed.

**Table C.26 Comparative education profile, persons aged 15+, Kileely A, Castle A, Castle B, and Limerick City 2002**

Category	Kileely A % of population aged 15+	Castle A % of population aged 15+	Castle B % of population aged 15+	Limerick City Borough % of population aged 15+
Still at school	9.04	10.82	10.76	12.24
Left school under 15	26.44	7.92	3.79	11.89
Left school at 15	13.86	4.93	4.24	7.62
Left school at 16	21.44	12.41	9.37	13.25
Left school at 17	11.19	13.20	10.04	9.44
Left school at 18	11.02	17.86	18.75	10.26
Left school at 19	2.07	4.49	5.35	3.69
Left school at 20	0.43	4.31	5.13	2.71
Left school at 21 and over	1.80	16.02	26.56	11.60
Not stated	0.34	3.78	6.02	10.60
Other	2.32	4.22	0.89	4.34
Total				

Table C.26 compares the educational profile of Kileely A with its neighbouring wards of Castle A and B and with the city as a whole. According to the above profile 61.74% of people in Kileely A had left school by the age of 16. The corresponding figures for Castle A and B were 25.26% and 17.40% respectively. The corresponding figure for the city as a whole was 72.85%. Kileely A again emerges from the 2002 data as an area in which early school leaving is substantially more prevalent than in the city as a whole.



**Table C.27 Males aged 15 and over whose full- time education has ceased are classified by the highest level of education completed (full-time of part- time) and by present status Kileely A 2002<sup>12</sup>**

Highest level of education	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Not stated	Total
Males 15+ at work	0	77	96	50	13	2	15	1	0	0	2	0	0	2	258
Males 15+ looking for 1 <sup>st</sup> job	0	9	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Males 15+unemployed	0	54	19	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	79
Not in labour force	1	105	15	4	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	130
Total	1	245	139	55	16	3	18	2	0	1	0	0	0	3	485

In 2002, 31.42% of males who had completed their education at primary level were in employment, 69.06% who had completed lower secondary level were employed, and 90.90% of those with Leaving Certificate were employed. Fundamentally, the greater the level of education the greater the probability of being in employment.

**Table C.28 Females aged 15 and over whose full- time education has ceased are classified by the highest level of education completed (full-time of part- time) and by present status Kileely A 2002**

Highest level of education	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Not stated	Total
Females 15+ at work	0	44	61	68	3	3	16	0	1	1	2	1	0	2	202
Females 15+ looking for 1 <sup>st</sup> job	0	2	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
Females 15+ unemployed	0	9	16	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27
Not in labour force	0	200	75	21	6	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	306
Total	0	255	155	95	9	4	16	0	1	1	3	2	0	3	544

In 2002, 17.25% of females who had completed their education at primary level were in employment, 39.35% who had completed lower secondary level were employed, and 71.57% of those with Leaving Certificate were employed. As with all previous

<sup>12</sup> In the 2002 Census categories 1-9 remain the same as in previous census data categorisation. X, in previous census data now corresponds to category 10 in the 2002 data. Category 11 denotes 'Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma' a new category, Category 12 denotes a 'Postgraduate Degree (Masters), and 13 denotes a Doctorate.

census findings, in relation to both males and females, the greater the level of education the greater the probability of being in employment.

The above educational profiles, spanning 1981 to 2002, portray Kileely A as an area with low educational attainment, poor retention within the educational system, and no improvement in the retention profile over the census collection dates. Between 1991 and 1996, the percentage of Kileely A population who had left school by 16 increased by 1%, whereas in the same period it decreased by 2.18% for Castle A, 6.75% for Castle B and 5.1% for Limerick City Borough as a whole.

Educational attainment not only impacts on directly on the person concerned but also on the broader family unit and the community.

Kellaghan, et al. citing Bourdieu and Passeron posit that:

Levels of parental education would seem to be particularly relevant to children's school performance since it can be argued that it is the best socio-economic indicator of the cultural capital that a family can provide for children (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) (Kellaghan et al., 1995:34).

Social class representation within the Kileely A area is heavily weighed towards the unskilled manual workers categories, with under representation of the population in the higher social classes.

I now draw on the personalised accounts of my research participants to further contextualise this study.

## **C.6 Personal accounts: Lived experiences**

During the research process I asked participants to describe the conditions in which the project evolved and developed. They did so with clarity. Responses were sometimes filled with emotion as people recounted a time of high unemployment, poor educational attainment, poor prospects, and a very restricted life style with no opportunities to be involved in adult education opportunities.

In Chapter Five, the 'Area Profile' chapter, I noted Mc Cafferty's concern with using statistical information in isolation. Drawing on his extensive experience in constructing community profiles, he advocates the use of both qualitative and

quantitative data, contending that qualitative data brings life to 'the static picture which statistics paint' (1993:2). The preceding section of this chapter draws heavily on statistical data to build a profile of the study area. The following interview excerpts offer a personalized account of the circumstances in which KCP evolved and in which people lived and raised their families.

This section draws on my primary research. In an effort to build a comprehensive profile I have sub divided the description of the area into the following sub sections, physical environment, economic context, educational context and women's lives.

### **C.6.1. Physical environment**

In this section Kileely of the 1980s is described both by residents and by people from outside the area who came into the area to work or who were in a position to observe the conditions of the area. One interviewee who worked for a statutory educational organisation described the area as follows:

It [Kileely] was very representative of very disadvantaged communities, because of ... You had poor communities, stratified communities, segregated communities. I suppose I could say Limerick was a bad example. You had a lot of single class housing estates (Statutory Agency Interviewee no. 1).

According to my informant, the area was representative or typical of communities with high unemployment and low educational achievement. And to compound the problem, communities were stratified and segregated with extensive concentrations of local authority housing with similar characteristics of low educational attainment, high unemployment, and associated problems. These housing estates radiated in two wedges to the north west and south east of the city.

A long time resident, mature learner and committee member, who was born in the area and raised her children in the area, graphically described the physical and economic living conditions in which KCP evolved. With a tinge of anger in her voice, she referred to how our political leaders were cautioning us to live frugally while they dined expensively. She not only spoke of the economic conditions, but the physical condition of the houses. As stated previously the houses in Kileely were built of mass concrete, had no insulation, no bathroom facilities, and one cold water tap in the kitchen and a single downstairs cubicle toilet. Walls were damp because of lack of insulation and heating was inadequate:

It was a hand to mouth existence.

Even the living conditions ... I suppose unless your family were grown up ... were quite poor. We lived in houses with cold water and there was no hot water. Anybody that had central heating ... Jesus they wouldn't have had central heating in anyway, so you heated one room. If you lit your fire in the sitting room that was it. You were warm in the sitting room, you went up stairs and you could have been in the Siberian winter. The houses were real cold (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 2).

Apart from housing there were two other buildings in the area, the ball alley and the school. The ball alley was demolished in the mid 1990s as it was deemed a site of anti social behaviour. The school was both physically and demographically deteriorating. The school was built in 1945 and suffered from severe vandalism during the 1980s and 1990s. One teacher recalled her first introduction to the school. She said:

When I went there first ...every time we came in on a Monday the windows were broken and the place was very run down looking and shabby... Half of the school wasn't used. There was whole parts of the school ... The first room was used and the rest wasn't. It was very very ... am ... you know damp windows broken, and lights wouldn't work. It wasn't much of a place, ... it wasn't you know (Teacher no. 3).

This depressing impression of the school is echoed by one of the tutors who came to work in the area in the late 1980s. On beginning to work with KCP this tutor wondered 'how long is this place going to stay open'?

As mentioned in Chapter Six, 'Journey of Hope: Transference, Transition and Transformation' the enrolment in the school had declined in the mid 1980s when a new school was built in the nearby estate of Moyross. This decline continued until it became a one-teacher school. When I asked interviewees to describe the 1980s as well as speaking about the economic and educational contexts they also spoke with great sadness of how the school was declining:

It's been there a long time. You brought it on in leaps and bounds. We have no rooms now. In the beginning we had rooms to let. Tis great again, thank God (Mature Adult learner no. 1).

This sentiment is echoed by another woman who was saddened by the decline in school numbers and very much aware of how the school could have become derelict and abandoned. She talks about my involvement in the process of regeneration. She said:

Ann, you put Kileely school back on the map. Cos it was kinda dying out, wasn't it? The numbers were going down hill. And then with all those classes you got because ... the school could have ended up like so many, a neglected empty building. That's what it could have ended up like eventually, Ann you know what I mean (Young adult learner, 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 2)

In conclusion the quality of housing and the condition of the school both physically and demographically was very bad. There is one more physical factor which needs to be mentioned. The housing estate is located very close to the city dump. This caused a health hazard in terms of rats and flies. There were also the fumes generated from wire burning, when the plastic wire coating was burned off to expose the copper wire which was sold to scrap metal merchants.

### **C.6.2 Economic context**

During the mid 1980s the unemployment rate for Kileely A was 16.3%. The interviews data enables us to put a human face on this phenomenon, and gain an insight into the repercussions of living on inadequate income. One interviewee, who worked within a statutory educational context, described the area as ‘...non working, low levels of income and dependency on social income, cyclical dependency on social income ... for several generations’ (Statutory Agency Interviewee no. 1).

Graphic descriptions of the area in the 1980s emerged from residents of the area during a focus group interview with the members of the project committee. Not only did they see it as a bleak time for adults without work, but also saw it as a time of little hope of employment for young people. Parents were questioning what future lay ahead for their teenage children. The issue of the cost of education and the ultimate point of keeping your children in school (especially secondary school) when they might have no future in the workforce was also very real. These women were raising their children during the 1980s and have very clear recollections of the struggles involved, the cost of education and the poor prospects for young people. The extract from KCP committee focus group below graphically describes the atmosphere of unemployment and hopelessness which prevailed at that time:

Voice 1: Unemployment was unbelievable. It was ... An atmosphere of depression

Voice 2: That was the time Charlie Haughey was telling us to tighten our belts

Voice 1: And his charvey shirts

Voice 3: A lot of unemployment too ... was very bad

Voice 1: Oh it was very bad. I remember walking down Ballynanty (adjacent corporation housing estate) and I'll never ... I ... started to shake, it gave me such a shock to see the queue of people lined up for -the dole it was just ..just ... my God ... it was bad

Voice 2: They were telling us to tighten our belts. I remember in the 80s when my children would have been ... what ... they were still young- you kept thinking to yourself by the time they finish school what's going to be there for them? ... Very bleak outlook in the 80s actually

Voice 1: You couldn't see it getting any better

What you were scared of was, you were encouraging them to stay at school and they were saying for what?

Voice 2: The likes of Mc Donald's were looking for people with a Leaving cert to hand out chips and you are thinking to yourself ... my God ... at that time ... Most people, you know ... Free education is a myth. It is very expensive to keep children in school particularly if they were going into secondary ... And a lot of money ... A lot of people would have questioned the reason why they would be paying all this money for children to have a Leaving cert to work in the likes of Mc Donalds

Voice 1: Or not work at all

Voice 3: Or not work at all

Voice 2: You were thinking to yourself you could see a situation where the youngsters had to emigrate ... And I think a lot did in the end

voice 3 and 4: They did

Voice 1: They had to, they didn't have a choice. Like I said it was like the 40s and 50s.

Yet another voice describes the dismal reality of the 1980s. This tutor alludes to the position of adults just managing to survive, there was nothing extra, no surplus. And yet again the prospects of young people are perceived as bleak:

[Kileely] was an environment where people were finding it difficult to survive. High interest rates 17+ %. A new generation facing unemployment. A new generation facing little or no prospects (Tutor no. 1).

Another voice, a participant in the adult classes was very aware of the impact of unemployment on the area, and reminds us that it was an area where there was reliance on industry and manual labour, and those with low-skill jobs were badly hit:

In 1985 times were very bad Ann. The unemployment was terrible. Places like Kileely were the worst hit. There was a reliance on industry and manual labour (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 2.).

So this is the human face of unemployment, not much money, not much work, not many prospects. And within that context people were considering the value of education, considering whether there was a value in supporting a child to stay at school. There was an awareness that sending a child to secondary school was expensive, both in loss of potential income to the family and in terms of the cost of educational support, including money for books, bus fares and uniforms:

In the 80s I don't remember anyone around who would have had second level education. At that stage no one I knew had finished the Leaving Cert. Their parents wouldn't have been able to afford it. They are all very low incomes ...No free education anyway. Still isn't, if you consider books and things like that. So it wouldn't have been an option. A lot of people would have been depending that when their children got to 14 or 15, they would have been out working and helping out. And we weren't talking about luxuries. We were talking about helping out to keep a home running as far as heating, and electricity, and food was concerned. We weren't talking about people having foreign holidays. There was no money. I mean most of us at that time were struggling when Charlie Haughey was buying...( Mature adult learner, committee member no. 2).

One young woman who was a very young mother during the 1980s remembered those lean days when she was raising her young family. She spoke passionately about the not having any extra money, and was very clear that the ethos of KCP made learning opportunities accessible to her:

I can honestly tell you this. When my children were younger, when we hadn't our supper. When we had nothing, I used to go down to the classes. No one ever put me under pressure to put that £1 into that box or cup if you...If you hadn't got it, you were still welcome. No one put me under pressure say here... If you haven't got it, you have to go. If you hadn't got it, it didn't matter. Put it in when you have it (Young adult learner no. 4).

Another woman recounted how hard she had to work to make ends meet during that time. While unemployment levels were high, women worked in a sub culture of child minding and housecleaning and home help. This was low paid "invisible" domestic work and I clearly remember women doing this work not only in the 1980s but in the 70s when I was growing up in the area. A friend of my family did this work and I clearly remember her recounting very mixed experiences working for different households. One woman recalled:

Personally I worked 6 days of the week when my kids were small, 6 days a week. At the time I was doing a bit of housework and home help and what have you....And honest to God when I think of what I was actually paid, and I was meeting myself at the cross roads, I don't know what road I was taking...and that was not for luxuries (Mature adult learner and committee member no. 2).

A volunteer who worked in the area during this time reflected that the women 'were just dragging themselves along':

### C.6.3 Educational context

To gain an understanding of the educational context it is important to have an insight into the educational attainment of adults and their aspirations for their children, as well as an insight into the role of the statutory agencies in addressing educational needs. The previous section on the economic context described how the people were living ‘hand to mouth’, job prospects were every poor, and the overall environment was bleak. This section explores the educational context of the time.

One woman, a parent of two young children in the 1980s, graphically reflects on her own level of attainment and refers to educational attainment within the community at that time:

I didn't have second level education. I finished at 6<sup>th</sup>, and did one years commercial. I was working when I was 14. So most people of my generation and older would never have been in the situation [of completing secondary school]. It's very, very rare. It's only our children (Mature adult learner No. 5).

All the parents from the area I interviewed for this thesis left school in their early teens. None of them completed state examinations. However, it became very clear that because of the lack of formal and continuing education there was an unfulfilled learning “need” in their lives as the excerpt below highlights. I asked this interviewee to identify why adults would want to access learning opportunities. Her response highlights the on-going learning needs of the adult community, especially those denied educational opportunities earlier in their lives. The interview took place in her own kitchen and she spoke with conviction and passion:

[Adult learners] want a bit of knowledge. They want to know everything. They feel they missed out. They want that knowledge. They really need it in their lives. They didn't get it when they were young. They had no choice but to work or look after parents or whatever. They just need in their lives. It's something that's missing. Some people feel like that (Mature adult learner no. 2).

I also sat in a kitchen of another house and interviewed a mother and daughter. The younger woman had been involved in a number of strands of the project, the older woman in the adult education aspects. Both spoke passionately about their value for education, about how it must become accessible to everybody. There was an innate awareness that people from the area had not benefited from the educational system, and of the need to create accessible pathways for people to become involved in education. These women, a generation apart, had a shared hunger for learning.



Mother and daughter became intensely serious when the subject of education and achievement were raised. They valued learning and they were so aware of their own needs and of the needs of the adult population in the area:

We were only 14 [leaving school]. We all left school early, and we never got the chance. And this [KCP] gave us all the chance. And we all needed it. We all needed that chance, and you gave it to us Ann (Young adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 2).

There was also an awareness among parents of the need to help their children with homework and to support school work in general. One mother recounts how she was glad of the support she got in the school to help her own child. This woman had left school early, and had very negative memories of her school days. She wanted to support her children to succeed within the educational system. And in the middle of a bleak environment people who themselves had not achieved within the educational system (through no fault of their own) realised the potential value of education:

The way you started it [KCP] at the start Ann is. 'Come in', and I remember it. You had the small little room and you would say 'Come in to help you to help your children'. That's the way it was. And that's the way I found it great to help my children that time. So we got used to it then and all the classes (Mature adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 2).

There were also personal testaments of how lack of educational achievement had impacted on life opportunities. One person would like to have been a nurse, but her poor educational achievement debarred her from that career. She 'swore' her children would never have the same experience. The consequences of her own lack of educational attainment proved a powerful motivator to her as a parent to support her children's learning:

I regretted it. I would have loved to have been a nurse. Then when I went over to England, I worked in hospitals. I can read, but it was my spelling ... I swore my children would not do that. I always valued and education. I said my children will not go through what I went through (Mature Adult learner and 'Three O'Clock School' mother no. 2).

The following account highlights the link between educational attainment and employment prospects. This woman worked long hours in very low paid employment and her anger was tangible as she spoke of long hours she had spent in menial low paid work:

There wasn't the education. There wasn't the money. There wasn't ... Without the education you couldn't get the jobs to pay you a decent wage. So you had all the shite jobs ... The shite jobs that paid you nothing (Mature adult learner and committee member no 2).

#### **C.6.4 Women's lives**

This section seeks to portray the lives of women in the area in the mid 1980s. Ireland has undergone vast economic and social changes during the twenty years period covered in this study. When interviewees were asked to describe the 1980s they not only spoke about the educational and economic circumstances in which they lived, but also the crippling social and cultural contexts. The social and cultural context is not accessible through the census data. It is only accessible through the sharing of personal accounts of lived experiences. Sometimes they explained the context of almost 20 years ago by making comparisons with the present. According to the people I interviewed, women spent a lot of their time in the home, cooking, cleaning and rearing children. This view was tendered both by the women themselves who were mothers in the 1980s and by their adult children. Also some of the tutors referred to the culture where women were very much in the home. The only exception to this I came across in my research was women talking of working in houses and doing home help work in order to 'keep body and soul together'. As previously stated women from this area who were working outside the home would have been involved in menial and low paid work.

During the course of interviewing, one young woman reflected on her own mother's lifestyle and recounted how her mother, like most married women at the time, spent her time in the home. She is aware of both the economic circumstances in which they raised their children and the lifestyle of women during that era:

It was hard back then. You were either a kind of a house wife...I'd say like 90% of the population was a housewife really ... weren't they? They didn't have much like. It (KCP) gave them something to look forward to as well like. Back then money wasn't really great and people were housewives. It (KCP) got them out of the house, and it helped adults to get to know each other as well like 'Three O'Clock School' participant no. 8).

One woman described her own life during those years and while she has no regrets about rearing her children she is very aware of the limitations of her lifestyle, of the lack of opportunity to meet other women and to socialize. Women were house bound and felt isolated. This is one of the insights that amazed me. I thought they would

have had very close friendships. However, they were busy raising their children, and it was not the type of area where people went into each other's houses for coffee mornings. So if they met in the street, or at mass, they would say hello but not much beyond that. Of course they helped each other out in times of difficulties, but according to the people I interviewed they did not have a place to meet, to congregate to share stories, and to be together. Really the public spaces were the church and the pub. One woman I spoke with, a mature adult learner saw the pub as a male domain at that time, and would rarely have gone to the pub:

We had no place to go before this [KCP] ... You might get a night out ... A drink, down the road to the pub for a drink from Monday to the following Saturday you were looking after children, cooking, and washing, and bathing them. Getting them ready for Saturday and Sunday again. Not all women were like that. I do know that. The majority I know that was their lives. Men could go out anytime they liked (Mature adult learner no. 2)

This view is supported by another woman who reflects on her time living in Kileely. While she loves the area and had lived there all her life she was acutely aware of the need for a place for women to meet. As was said it is not an area where the culture of coffee mornings existed. As one long term resident and member of KCP put it 'Kileely women never had anything going for them. The women, they never had any place to go, or anything to do, or correspond with anybody'.

The younger women reflected on their mothers' lifestyles and compared them to their own. The young women interviewed were former SPACE group participants, young women involved in adult classes and former 'Three O'Clock School' participants and ancillary staff. These women reflected on their mothers' lifestyles and were acutely aware of how womens' lives have changed. These young women compared their lives with their mothers in terms of time spent in the home, financial resources, and financial independence, and opportunities for socialising and learning. They also commented on the transformation which had occurred in their mother's lives since they became involved with KCP. One young woman remarked that:

It was great for my mother to come over to classes. For her to get away from the family. Because she had spent so many years looking after her family, that I don't remember my mother being in anything until the classes started over here. That was great for her cos she got out to do her own thing like (Space participant no. 4).

Yet another young woman had a very sharp insight into the power relations between men and women. She said many women wouldn't have gone outside the home to get involved in anything that was going on, because they had specific home

responsibilities and there were expectations that they would be in the home to have the husband's dinners ready and to look after the children. She paraphrased what a typical woman's response might be to an invitation to be part of a community learning group:

I couldn't go cos he would be asking me where I was going, I'd have to be back at 10 o'clock.  
"What time will it definitely be over?"  
I couldn't go cos he was waiting for his dinner.  
Now they (women) couldn't care if he never had a dinner. Men were the bosses (Ancillary staff no. 3).

And this was substantiated by another woman, a mature learner who with a profound note declared that, 'men could go out anytime they liked'.

One young woman described her own lifestyle and the freedom she has. She is married with children and working outside the home. She believes families have got much smaller and that women have more freedom than in her mother's time. She compares her freedom to go on a foreign holiday with her friends to her mother's lifestyle:

She never went across the road.  
She never went to Kilkee for a day on her own. No they [women] didn't. They wouldn't be left do it (allowed). They wouldn't be left go (hushed tones) He'd have to be...His dinner would have to be on the table. And that would be it. You know that. "Where is my dinner"? They [women] had no money. They [women] hadn't enough for food, never mind to go on a foreign holiday. And if they [women] got a job at all, they [men] gave them nothing at all. You know if they went out to work. 'Sure you have your own money'. They would keep it all, especially if they were any way fond of the pint (Ancillary staff no. 3).

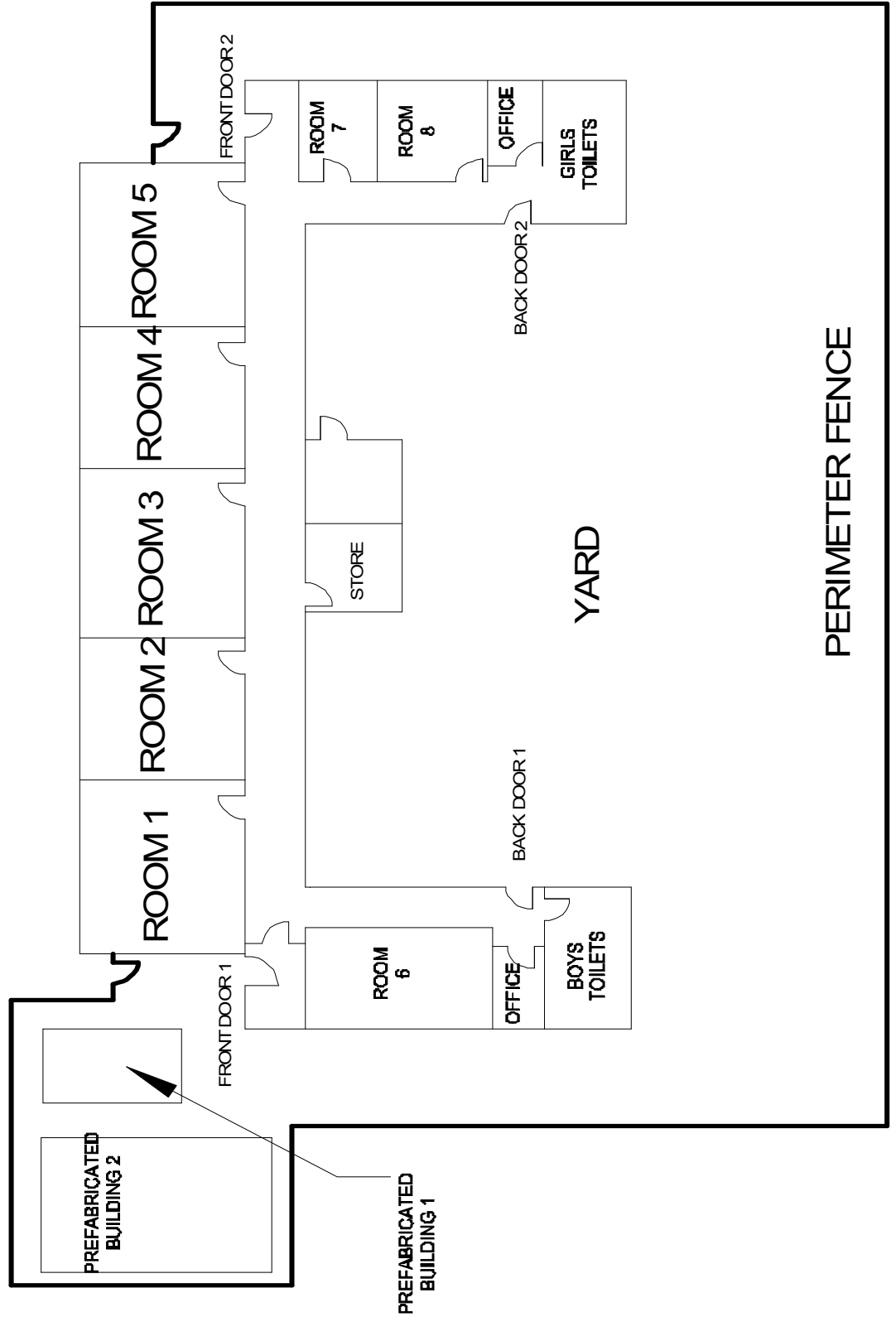
## **C.7 Conclusion**

In this appendix I have endeavored to profile the economic, educational and social contexts in which KCP evolved. Kileely estate has been described in depth, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data sources. The harsh economic, social and educational context in which KCP evolved has been described. The people of Kileely managed to rise above the significant challenges and work together to build a powerful community project which brought accessible learning opportunities to children and adults. In Chapter Six, 'Journey of Hope, Transference, Transition and Transformation' I chronicle the developments of KCP over this twenty-year period. In Chapter Seven, 'Did Kileely Community Project Make a Difference?', I profile the impact of KCP on the lives of individuals and on the school, home and community contexts. In Chapter Eight, 'Celebrating the Survival, Success and Sustainability of

Kileely Community Project, Excavating the Factors which made Kileely Community Project work', I present a range of factors which facilitated the development and sustainability of KCP. All of these factors must be understood within the context in which KCP evolved and developed. KCP evolved and grew in a harsh environment. There are many reasons why it should not have succeeded, however, hope and love won out.



# Appendix D Floor Plan of Host School











## **Appendix F Children and Parents Learning Together**

A programme for parents who wish to be proactive in supporting and promoting learning for their children.

Programme devised by Ann Higgins

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## **Children and Parents learning together**

We learn by using our senses, we see, we taste, we hear, we smell, and we touch the world around us. If we want to learn something the more of our senses we use the better the chance we will remember what we are learning.

A child learns through play, listening, seeing, touching, tasting and smelling. Even as adults we use our senses to learn, so it is very important that we train our senses so that our learning will be more successful.

As a child gets older, moving on through secondary school, much of what he or she is learning is based on the skills and concepts that they acquired in the early years of life and the early years of the primary school.

If a child has lots of experience with sand and water, bricks and crayons and books it will be of great benefit to the child as he or she gets older.

I will now try to show you some ways in which you can help your child at home, always remember that in school the child is one of 30 children, but you have a great opportunity to give personal attention to your child at home. This special time is good for parent and for the child, there are so many jobs to be done in a home it is really important to take a special time to be with your child.

The home is where the child first learns to talk, to play and to laugh, it is their first learning place and I hope you have lots of fun and happy times playing and learning with your children.

### **Playbox.**

This could be an old shoebox.

Fill it with buttons, bricks, shells, pegs, bottle tops, keys, bricks, lollipop sticks and shells.

Make sure they do not put anything into their mouths.

A child will play for hours and hours with this. They will build houses, make little gardens and little shops.

But there are also lots of other uses for this box.

A child can learn his or her colours, and all about size and shape and weight.

Try asking some of these questions while he/she is playing with the box.

How many buttons are in the box? (stones, keys, conkers, shells)

How many shells? How many bricks? Are there more shells than bricks?

What colour is this brick? Can you find a button the same colour as it?

Put all the big things together

Put all the small things together

Put all the heavy things together

Put all the light things together

Put all the blue things together  
Put all the yellow round things together  
Put all the green hard things together

Can you find something soft in the box?  
Can you find something hard in the box?  
Can you find something bright in the box?  
Can you find something dark in the box?

Can you find something heavy and blue?  
Can you find something big and soft?

Pick out 2 shells for me.  
Pick out 3 bricks for me.  
Pick out 4 buttons for me.

Pick out 2 yellow buttons for me.  
Pick out 4 green bricks for me.

Draw a picture of 2 cats.  
Colour them pink.

#### Qualities of objects in the play box

Colour  
Shape  
Size  
Weight  
Number  
Length

#### **Making Numbers**

It is very important that children learn to make their numbers properly.

Make sure that he or she is holding her /his pencil properly and sitting properly.  
Small children tend to stab the pencil into a page so they need lots of practice with blackboards and chalk and making their numbers with marla.

A big page on which you have drawn a number is a very useful way to teach them how to make their numbers properly. I call this Rainbow numbers so that the child doesn't get bored they use a different colour crayon each time. Tracing paper is also very useful for this and the children enjoy it.

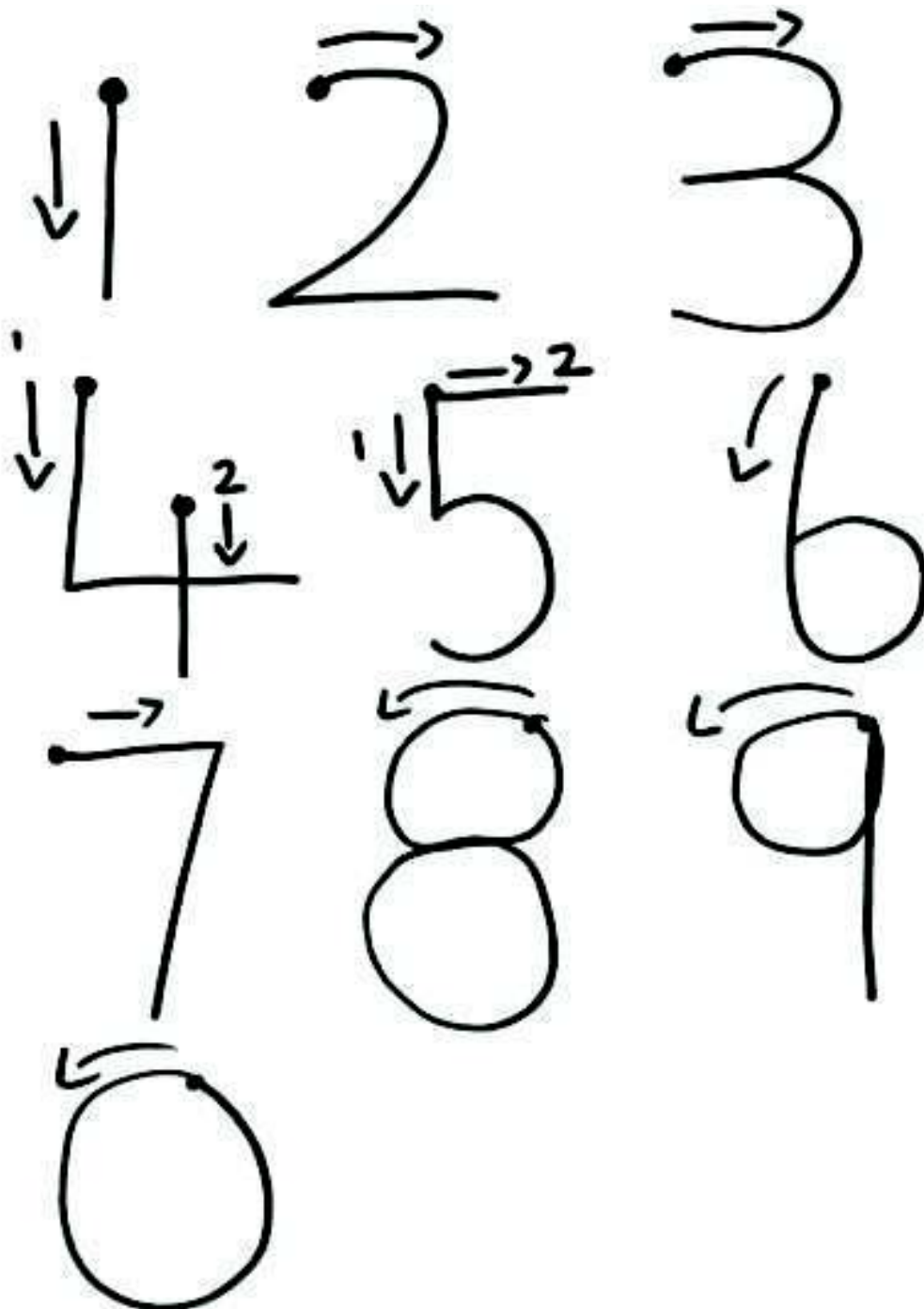
If you have a very young child you can get special pencils shaped like triangles or you can get special triangular grips to put on the pencil to encourage good pencil hold from the start.

Children often start making their numbers from the wrong starting point, and just like the letters of the alphabet it is very important that they get into the habit of doing it properly from the start.

It would be a good idea to draw two apples beside number 2 so that the child begins to associate the number with the meaning. You could also draw 2 circles beside number 2 and ask the child to pick out 2 bricks from the playbox.

Ask the child to pick out 3 buttons to put beside number 3, and maybe 4 lollipop sticks to put beside number 4.

This is the proper way to make the numbers, always start at the dot,



## Writing.

When children come to school they start writing by learning different patterns. These patterns help children develop pencil grip, fluency, proper pencil pressure, left to right orientation and gain confidence in making marks on paper. They then move on from these patterns to make letters, and later onto words.

It is very important that the child gets lots and lots of practice working with crayons and pencils to develop their confidence and skills. Always say something positive about their work and praise their efforts. Don't worry if it looks like a scribble at first the important thing is the child gets lots of practice and praise.

Children can practice patterns and letters using;

Pencils and paper

Crayons and paper

Pencils and tracing paper

Crayons and tracing paper

Paints

Marla

Blackboards and chalk

Tracing the shape of letters in wet sand

Cut out large letter shapes.

Here are some patterns, which the children do in school, always start at the left and move to the right.

| - | - | - |

1 0 1 0 1 0

W W W W

c c c c

u u u u

|| = || = ||

|| 0 || 0 ||

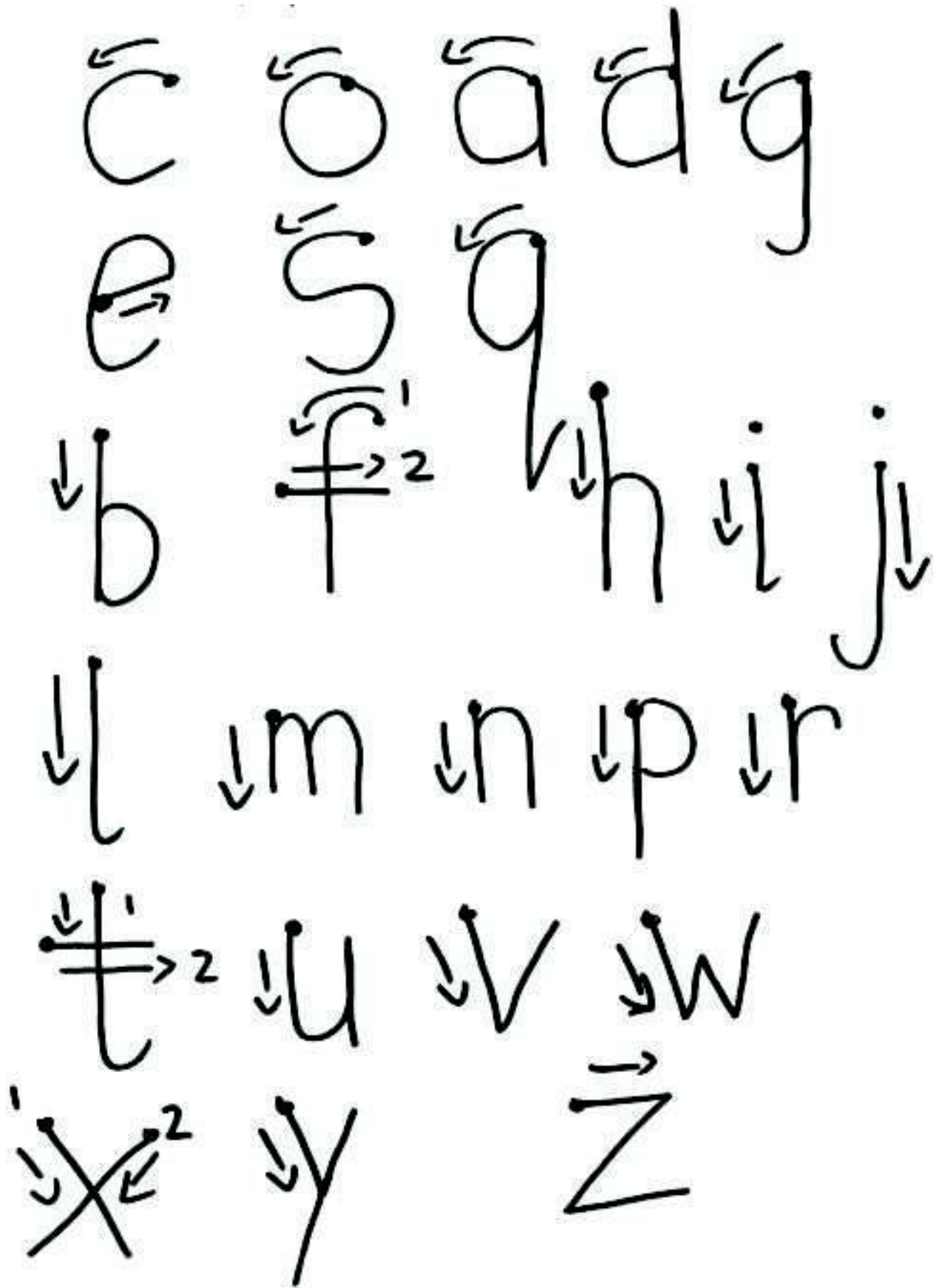
= 0 = 0 =

m m m m

0 x 0 x 0



Here is a list of letters, always start at the dot.





### **Simple Addition.**

You will have heard me say again and again that the child learns by doing and the more practice and praise he or she gets the better he or she will achieve and the more fun you will have with your child.

When the child has a basic idea of number, can give you 2 bricks and 3 buttons and always gets it right he or she will have learned a lot.

You can play number games with the child, using the play box again. I had 3 magic buttons a dragon came in the window and ate 2 , How many were left? Use the 3 buttons, take away the 2 so the child sees the 1 that is left. This is very good for the child as he / she is developing very important number skills.

The next step is to begin simple addition. Always use the bricks and buttons from the box to start this phase as the child is much too young to do it in his/her head and will only start guessing. Use the materials first and later on you can move on to asking questions which the child will answer in his/her head.

Take out 2 buttons, take out 3 bricks. Ask questions like,

If my mammy gave me 2 buttons and my sister gave me 3 bricks how many would I have altogether. If the child does not understand the question, put 2 buttons in one hand and 3 bricks in the other and move them together and then count them.

Children sometimes find it very hard to understand the concept of addition, they must have lots of opportunity to understand what each number means before asking them to add them together. In a remedial situation, children sometimes need to go back to the basics that I have been talking about and then move on once they have a firm understanding.

### **Addition Continued**

The child learns by doing. He/She must have a good grasp of number values before he/she can really begin to add or subtract.

By number values I mean, understanding that 2 means 2 whether it is 2 shoes, 2 bricks or 2 children . They should have a very good grasp of number values before moving on to addition.

Some children find maths very easy others have problems acquiring the concepts of number and addition. This can be greatly helped by lots and lots of playtime where numbers are used, counting the objects in the playbox, counting the flowers in the garden, the socks in the drawer, the spoons on the table.

So if a child has lots of practice counting it will help him/her greatly to understand number values and to move on to addition and much more complicated maths later on in their lives.

## The story of 4

I am just using this as an example of how to improve a child's understanding of number. You would cover the story of 2 and 3 before you would talk about "the story of 4".

Don't be in any hurry to move too quickly, if you rush the child he/she may not enjoy learning and may not get enough practice and may run into problems later on.

### Method Number 1

Pick 4 buttons from the box.

1. Get the child to count the buttons.
2. Let the child see you putting 1 button into a saucer.
3. Ask the child to count how many buttons are left.
4. Discuss the story with the child, I had 4 buttons and one got lost ,How many were left?
5. Get the child to talk about it as much as possible.
6. So 3 and 1 makes ?
7. Get the child to put all the buttons back together and count them.
8. Get the child to make 4 for you in different ways by dividing the buttons up and talking about them.
9. Let them discover that

$$0+4=4$$

$$1+3=4$$

$$2+2=4$$

$$3+1=4$$

$$4+0=4$$

### Method number 2

1. Ask the child to count the legs on the chair.
2. Touch each one as you count them if necessary.
3. Ask the child , If I painted 1 leg of the chair , how many would I have left to paint?
  1. Be careful about guessing, let the child tie a ribbon around one leg of the chair and count the legs without ribbons.

### Method Number 3

1. Put 4 beads on a long piece of wool.
2. Get the child to count them.
3. Now move 1 bead to one end,
4. Ask the child to count how many are left on the other end.
5. So, 1 and 3 makes 4.

6. Get the child to “make 4” for you by dividing up the beads in different ways.
7. As with methods 1 and 2 above let the child discover different ways to make 4.

#### **Method 4**

Stories, You can make up lots of stories and have great fun with the child. If you are working on the story of 4 with the play box , you might decide to make a bedtime story using the same elements.

Once upon a time there was a giant who had 4 boots . One day he lost 2 boots, how many did he have left?

Once upon a time there was a little girl who had 4 candles on her birthday cake, she blew out 3, how many were still lit?

One day I went to the shop and bought 4 apples, but I had a hole in my pocket and when I got home I only had 1 left, how many did I lose on the way home?

Learning about numbers and addition and subtraction can be lots of fun. Most children will get the concepts with enough practice.

#### **Working and Learning with children.**

1. Always praise the child
2. Try to create a special time each day when you might tell a story or play a game.
3. Remember a parent is much more important than a teacher as the teacher might have 30 children to work with and you have the chance to give your child special attention.
4. Toys. Don’t be fooled by the toy sellers. So often they are advertising very expensive toys that are not really helpful to the child’s learning at all.
5. Children love to play with water, sand, a box of old buttons and pegs.
6. Consider joining the library.
7. If you have problems helping your child with homework consider joining an adult literacy class.
8. Catch your child doing something good every day and praise him/her.
9. Never compare him/her to his/her brother or sister.
- 10 Listen to his/her worries.
- .11. Make a little time to ask how school is going, if they had fun with their friends, and find out what makes them happy or sad.
1. When you give your child a treat it does not always have to cost money. Tell them a story, or take them for a walk to feed the swans, or allow them to stay up a little later.
2. Always encourage them to draw and paint and colour in. This develops interests and hobbies for later on.
3. Make time to listen, and praise them, if a child comes home from school with 4 spellings right out of 10, tell them you are delighted with the 4 they got right and help them to get more right the following week. Let the child score against themselves, and improve against themselves.

## **Mathematical Language**

The following is a list of “Mathematical Language” to use when working with the playbox, walking around the supermarket or even reading stories. You will find lots of opportunities to use this language and it will be very helpful to children in school.

Big/small  
Biggest/smallest  
Bigger than /smaller than

Long/short  
Longest/shortest  
Longer than/shorter than

Heavy/light  
Heaviest/ lightest  
Heavier than/lighter than

Soft/hard  
Softest/hardest  
Softer than/harder than

Bright/dark  
Brightest/darkest  
Brighter than/darker than

More than/ less than

## **Shapes**

Square, triangle, rectangle, circle, semi-circle

High/ low  
Highest/ lowest  
Higher than/lower than

## **Time**

Before/after  
Today/tomorrow/yesterday  
A long time/ a short time

Early/late  
Earliest/latest  
Earlier than/later than

Quick/slow

### **Days of the week**

Monday  
Tuesday  
Wednesday  
Thursday  
Friday  
Saturday  
Sunday

### **Months of the Year**

January  
February  
March  
April  
May  
June  
July  
August  
September  
October  
November  
December

### **Reading**

**Learning to read is a very complicated process.**

It is very important to encourage the child and to develop a positive attitude towards reading. Encourage Santa to bring a book for Christmas, and if the child is getting a treat consider buying a book instead of sweets.

You should also consider joining the library, it costs very little and you can get books for very young children as well as for older children. Some children learn to read without any great difficulty but some children find reading a very difficult task. Reading should be fun and always encourage your child and praise the effort he/she is making.

### **Story time**

It is very important to tell stories to children. It develops their memory, and they learn new words. It is a fun thing to do, and you will be developing very positive attitudes towards reading in the child.

You can make up stories out of your head, very often a child loves to hear about what life was like when their parents or grandparents were young.

Get them to tell the story back to you afterwards and discuss the story with him/her. Young children need to learn to hold a book, turn the pages and identify that the page holds words as well as pictures. You could discuss the pictures on each page with them and even get them to guess what happens next in the story or invent a different ending.

Children could make their own books, just a few pages stapled together, pictures only at first and as the child gets older they could move on to writing a book.

## **Nursery Rhymes**

These are very important because the child is listening to the sounds of the words. If he/she is going to be a good reader it is very important to develop their “listening skills”.

Nursery Rhymes also develop memory and the child learns new words.

A child learns to read using his eyes and ears, and there are several ways that you can help him/her to develop these skills.

### **Eye Training.**

1. Trace around pictures and colour them.
2. Use tracing paper to trace over large pictures from colouring books (compare the child’s effort with the original).
3. Spot the difference activities.
4. Play games with matching cards, snap and pairs. These can be bought or you can make your own. Start simply with a few pairs and move on.
5. Join the dots.
6. Trace over letters.
7. Odd man out.
8. Complete the pattern.
9. Left to right activities.
10. Copying matchstick shapes.

### **Ear Training**

This is the basic groundwork for phonics, this just means letter sounds. The child will learn the sounds, which each letter makes, and so will have the skills to attack new words. If the child has had lots of ear training and praise it will be of great help to them when they come to learn letter sounds.

1. While walking into town close your eyes, what sounds can you hear?
2. Learn the sounds different animals make.
3. Game- have 4 different objects, wooden brick, bunch of keys, spoon and a plastic cup. Drop one on the table, the child has to guess which one you dropped.
4. Clap 3 times, get the child to listen and copy you.
5. Memory game, Ask your child to go to the door, knock 5 times then shake hands with teddy then sit on the floor. Start by asking them to just do two different activities in the right order, make the game fun and only ask them to do 3 activities in a row when they are well able to follow 2 in a row.
6. Nursery Rhymes.

## **Ways to help your child with reading**

1. Read stories to your child
2. Join the library.
3. Read nursery rhymes.
4. Point out “words” in the world around us, shop, bus, stop, open, closed, exit,
5. Do paired reading with your child.
  
6. Make reading time fun time.
7. Buy a book for a treat.
8. Praise and practice, encourage them even when they have difficulties.
9. Ask their class teacher how they are getting on.
10. Each child is special, do not compare children.
11. Make a special reading time each day; it might be only 10 minutes.

## **Some Common Problems with reading.**

**Memorising.** This happens when the child is simply memorising the sentences and often using the pictures on the page as clues. Watch out for this as the child can often successfully hide this from you. There are many ways to approach this problem e.g.

### **Emma and Joe are going to the farm.**

1. Ask your child to point to Joe/Emma /farm/to /the /are/
2. Make a word box; make sure to write the words correctly. Get the child to make a sentence using individual words.
3. There is a word starting with “E” can you find it? Which word is it? What does it say?
4. Play pairs and snap using the words from the child’s reading book. Start with three pairs of words and move on. Let the child win! The child must read the word each time he/she turns over a card. They win a button each time they get it right. This builds confidence as they see the pile of buttons getting bigger.





**Appendix G**

**Hatch 33 Achievement Award**



TCH 33 AWARD FOR ACHIEVEMENT '87

1st Prize

Group Category

Presented to

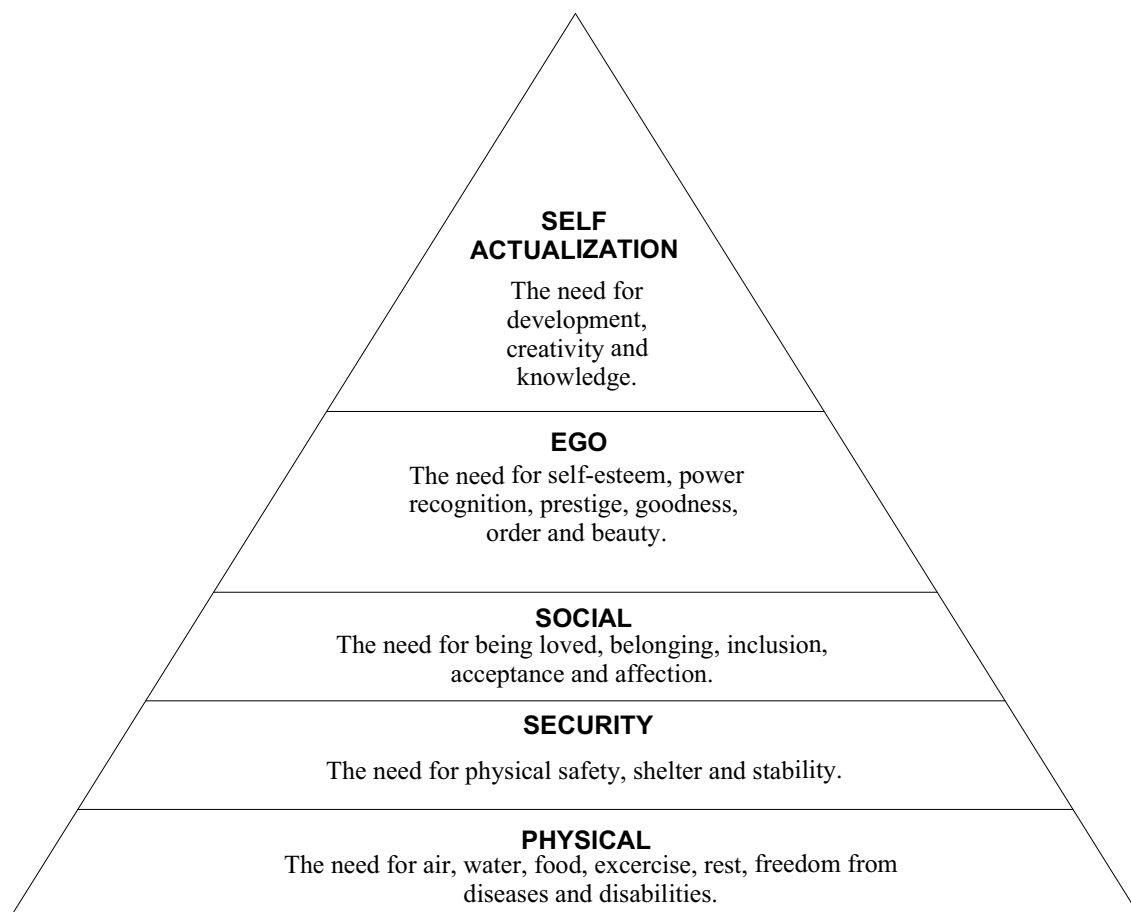
Kileely Community Project

by

John Lantry



## Appendix H Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



adapted from <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/>



## **Appendix I. Poem Child**

### **Child**

He sits on my shoulder  
Sometimes he whispers in my ear  
It opens my heart like a battleaxe.

He began as a specific child  
In a specific place at a specific time.

In a frozen moment our eyes met across eternity  
I read the pain in his eyes  
It echoed across a landscape of humiliation and fear.

He was seven years old  
Condemned beyond reprieve  
In a frozen moment, a frozen life chilled my bones.

Now many years later  
He haunts me  
Only when I am lucky  
And my heart leaps with fear that I will not answer his call.

Now he is not a specific child, gender or colour  
He is one of the many children of today's Ireland  
Disinherited by accident of birth.

He goes to school late without a lunch  
She leaves school without a destination.

You do not know this child who broke my heart  
But if you open your eyes you will see his watchful brother standing by the  
bridge  
His sister takes care of younger children, herself a child.  
Allow yourself to be vulnerable, to feel the pain  
So that your life can be disturbed by his silent cry.



## **Appendix J. Poem, Ann**

Ann

You've been there for us over the years,  
You held our hands and calmed our fears,  
When we needed you, you were always there,  
Letting us know you really cared.  
We know that we are very small.  
But we also know you love us all.

You've been so very good to us,  
When we were bad, you'd never fuss.  
You've given us so much of you.  
Be happy in everything you do.  
You have to leave us for a while  
We're very sad but have to smile.  
We hope someday you will return,  
To help our brothers and sisters to learn.

But before you leave you have to know,  
Just how much we love you so.

From all your children in St. Lelia's N.S., Kileely.

Composed by a parent and presented to me in 1998 when I 'left' St. Lelia's school to work in Mary Immaculate College.