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UNIVERSITY OF READING

Title: The New Junior Cycle: Exploring students' perceptions and experiences of learning under educational reform using Freire's analytical framework from a student/teacher perspective.

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Abstract

Drawing insight and inspiration from the work of Paulo Freire, this thesis used co-operative inquiry to explore post-primary Irish students' experiences of learning under the New Junior Cycle (GCSE) curriculum reform in the Republic of Ireland. The literature reviewed for this thesis provided evidence to suggest that successive Irish governments have organized the lower-second level curriculum around demand in the international labour market. The purpose of this inquiry was to investigate the link between economic shifts and the demand for certain types of subject knowledge under this curriculum reform. The object of the research conducted was to discover whether or not there was a correlation between the types of knowledge promoted under this reform and the subjects chosen by students for their Leaving Certificate (A Levels). The theoretical framework was informed by the principles of critical theory in exploring how organized learning has become part of the knowledge industry in Western schooling. The empirical study built upon the tenets of critical pedagogy by incorporating the pedagogical teachings of Paulo Freire into an applied research project. The goal of this study was to determine the extent to which the inclusion of students as researchers would enhance their ability to recognize the co-relation between curriculum reform and the subjects chosen by their peers. This research study took place in a single public school with a mixed student body, where the researcher is employed as a full-time teacher. The study focused on the curricular experiences of Transition Year (TY) students. A method of co-operative inquiry was used to carry out an empirical study in which the teacher as principal researcher worked alongside a small group of Transition Year students as assistant researchers. The conclusions drawn from the data gathered in this study confirmed that a positive co-relation existed between and the two main research objectives. It is hoped that this research will contribute to an ongoing debate in critical educational literature about the function of learning in schooling from the perspective of those who experience it.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Prof. Carol Fuller for taking the time to consider and accept the research proposal which marked the beginning of this educational journey. Without her foresight, this thesis may never have begun and without her insight, it may never have been completed. Her expertise proved to be an invaluable resource throughout the writing process and could always be called upon for a solution in a time of need.

More latterly, I am indebted to the knowledge, patience and guidance of Dr. Geoff Taggart, whose passion for education shines through all aspects of his character, both personally and professionally. He is the epitome of an educator who embodies their practice, which is evident in the fact that he is foremostly a person who has compassion for his students. His supervision provided me with a first-hand experience of the self-belief and resolve which can result from a pedagogy of care.

Special thanks go to my friend and former mentor, Dr. Brian Donovan – who taught me the difference between education and schooling. A person always remembers the pivotal moments which changed their life and I have no doubt that I would not be the person that I am today, if it were not for his guidance. He is a truly authentic pedagogue and remains the most brilliant human animal that I have the privilege of knowing. One repays their teacher badly if one always remains nothing but a pupil.

To the students who participated as researchers in this thesis – thank you for your willingness to learn. The pedagogical bond which exists between a teacher and their student is second only to that which exists between a parent and their child. For this reason, I never doubted the decision to include students as active participants within the research study and have no regrets about doing so in hindsight. Students outstrip adults when it comes to their knowledge of schooling and without their active contribution, education will remain an impossibility – it is high time that we learn this.

Due recognition is afforded to my family, who have always supported me. In particular, I would like to acknowledge my brother, Matthew. If this thesis has taught me anything, it is that we should listen to those who are younger than us, because they are often wiser than us.

The final and most important acknowledgement goes to Emma - the love of my life. Without her presence in my life, this thesis would never have been possible.

Declaration

I declare that apart from the influences here identified, I take full responsibility for the quality of the work which has been produced. I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Name: Andrew Wall

Signed: *Andrew Wall*

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Abbreviations

ASTI   Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland

CAO   Central Applications Office

CBA   Classroom-Based Assessment

CPD   Continuous Professional Development

CEB   Curriculum and Examinations Board

DES   Department of Education and Skills

EEC   Europe Economic Community

EMS   European Monetary System

ESRI   Economic and Social Research Institute

HEA   Higher Education Authority

IDA   Industrial Development Authority

JC   Junior Cycle

JCT   Junior Cycle for Teachers

NCCA   National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PISA   Programme for International Student Assessment

SEC   State Examinations Commission

SLAR   Subject Learning and Assessment Review

TUI   Teachers' Union of Ireland

VEC   Vocational Education Committee

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This first chapter will be given to the framing of the thesis as a whole. It will begin by providing a brief background to the main issues that the research sought to address. This contextual description will then be followed by a section detailing the rationale for the research itself. The chapter will then offer a detailed breakdown of the questions that the thesis attempted to answer. Drawing upon these questions, the research aims and objectives will then be outlined. A short overview will then be given of the research methodology that was used in the thesis in order to achieve its stated objectives. The chapter will then conclude by providing a short breakdown of the succeeding chapters, which will guide the thesis to its completion.

1.2 Research Background

Having worked as a teacher in both the UK and Ireland, I have had opportunity to reflect upon the practices that are used by governments and schools to shape students' perceptions of learning, both explicitly and implicitly. Entering into the teaching profession led me to realise that education is not a neutral process and that the role which schooling plays in society predominantly functions to serve the demands and interests of those other than students. In a similar way, returning to the classroom on the opposite side of the desk opened my eyes to the reality that schooling is something that is done to students, rather than for them. Now, working as state employee within a public school, I too am expected to shape students in the image of a dominant ideology by imposing the various moral, social, political and economic doctrines which form their curricular experience (Macedo, 1987).

Stemming from this personal experience, the direct focus of this thesis was given to the perceived influence of market-driven learning in Irish secondary education, with a particular focus on recent curriculum reform. For the purpose of this thesis the term 'market driven

learning' can be understood to refer to: '…conditions in which public education is utilized as a national commodity to attract economic return in the form of employment and foreign direct investment based on the free labour market demands' [researcher's definition]. This definition will be used throughout the thesis with reference to the economically driven changes which have taken place in Irish educational practice over the past thirty years and their impact upon recent secondary education curriculum reform. Resulting from these changes, it was deemed important to explore students' experiences and perceptions of recent curriculum reform, particularly in relation to its impact on their subject and career related decisions. Consequently, the decision to undertake a PhD in Education arose from a pedagogical obligation to equip future generations with the ability to explore and question their educational experiences. The aim of this undertaking was to provide students with the critical skills to reclaim the value of learning for themselves in a meaningful way. It is hoped that the findings drawn from this research will contribute towards the future development of policies relating to teacher training and development, while also filling a gap in the area of teacher and student awareness in secondary education.

Europe is recognized as the wealthiest continent in the world, due to standard of living which exists in the twenty-seven members states that comprise this economic union (Schachter, 2019). This status is reflected by the fact that the majority of European citizens live in developed areas, with access to healthcare and legal services, amongst other forms of social provision. This economic model is upheld by participating EU governments through a two-tier system in most aspects in the form of public and private sectors (Baeten et al, 2018). Within this union, both sectors function to advance economic development toward undertaking the development of different services within a given country. Education functions as one of these services within European economies (Coelho, 2020). To accommodate this model, education is generally centralised and standardised within most European countries (with notable

exceptions such as Germany, which operates a federal system) and employs a top-down model, with the hope that it will raise the national standard of economic and social development. The market demands set out by the EU have resulted in a system led in which the assessment of students is based on standardised testing in schooling. This system of assessment is regulated by two main bodies: The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This system of assessment lends itself to an educational model which is organised around the economic interests of the state and not the individual student. Education, according to this logic, is one of the lead driving forces which supports the fiscal development of a country. This approach to educational development across the Western hemisphere operates from the premise that economic growth is partly contingent upon how and what students learn. This rationale for education may be traced back as far as early as the late 1940s when such polices were deployed across both the U.S. and Europe as part of a wider public policy strategies used to stimulate economic recovery during the post-World War II period (Arriazu Muñoz, 2015). Educational policy within Europe was similarly determined by an economic approach between the 1970s until the end of the 1980s wherein vocational training primarily took place for the purpose of economic growth (Valle, 2006). Although this fiscal rationale existed within Europe for some time, it was not until the 1990s, that the link between education and economic development began to resemble its current form. The catalyst for this shift in education was a landmark treaty which was signed by all participating member states of the European Union in Maastricht (1992). This treaty sought to expand the economic role of education beyond vocational training by using it to boost competitiveness within the international labour market (Trilla, 2004). The geopolitical motivation behind this economic strategy within education was provided by the Reagan-Thatcher power axis, in which both the US and UK governments sought to establish an outright market for education (Pickard, 2014). The successful realisation of this strategy, brought to life

the neo-liberal vision of a Chicago School economist who argued that the aims and function of public schooling should be mirror those of private sector interests (Friedman, 1995). For the purpose of this thesis, the term 'neo-liberalism' and its diminutive 'neo-liberal' may be understood as meaning '…the deliberate intervention by government to encourage particular types of entrepreneurial, competitive and commercial behaviour in its citizens with the market as the regulatory mechanism' (Carter, 2016, p.33). It is helpful to note that the principles of neo-liberalism differ from the values of traditional liberalism, which aims to provide equality for all people and maximise individual freedom within society (Freeden, 2003). By contrast, neo-liberalism is characterized by a series of free-market economic policies which encourage individual competitiveness in all aspects of society in the pursuit of capital (Lynch, 2012). It is generally accepted that this economic logic has contributed significantly to the development and spread of conditions which have resulted in widespread class division and social inequalities (Parr, 2013; Ball, 2015; Giroux, 2018; Varoufakis, 2020). In relation to the current political climate, these inequalities have manifested themselves within a system in which democratically elected leaders across Europe, the UK and the US (henceforth referred to as 'the West') have attempted to normalize a culture of labour accountability and data production within all aspects of society (Giroux, 2018). This social logic is a direct result of an economic paradigm which seeks to mechanize and regulate the efficiency of human output through a system of quality control whose primary function is to generate capital (Honneth, 2009).

One such way that the neo-liberal paradigm has grown stronger in recent decades is through the development of a for-profit education system which emerged during the Reagan-Thatcher regime. Since this political administration held power, subsequent Western governments have attempted to intensify the market for education by creating a merger between the outcomes of national learning and global economic productivity (McLaren, 2015). Following the international financial crash in 2008, an international pattern emerged within education and

schooling which placed a renewed emphasis on learning for the economy (Verger, 2016). This strategy formed part of a resurgent trend within global education which saw a focus placed on the development and cultivation of scientific, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) toward the generation of economic growth (Sanders, 2009). As a result, many people within academic discourse now refer to this process as '…learning for the global economy' (Coles, 2018, p.240). Such language has now become a central feature of international policy development in education (Hill, 2009). It has been argued that the perpetuation of such terms stems from a cultural acceptance of neo-liberal ideology, particularly within the arenas of education and schooling (Giroux, 2014). It is within this context that the Republic of Ireland may be viewed in microcosm as a country which embodies many of the trends and policies that have emerged in global education as a result of neo-liberal ideology over the past three decades. This is to suggest that many of the approaches to education introduced by successive Irish governments have been directly shaped by market interests, over a prolonged period of time. One such strategy, which formed the main focus of this thesis, is the rise in importance afforded to particular forms of curricular learning at second-level, which in turn functions as a tool for economic stimulation in Ireland (Lynch and McGarry, 2016; Coolahan et al, 2017). Linked to this phenomenon, the rationale behind this thesis stemmed from a desire to explore the ways in which a recent lower secondary curriculum reform has been designed in order align student learning more closely with economic interests.

Drawing from the above, one of the main arguments the thesis was premised on is the hypothesis that second-level schooling is centred around the formation of student learning toward particular subject knowledge and exam pathways with the overall function of boosting national economic development through the attraction of foreign direct investment (Iannelli and Smyth, 2017). Consequently, the thesis attempted to explore the extent to which this phenomenon has become apparent in Irish lower second level schooling. In particular, it sought

to examine the ways in which Junior Cycle reform (NCCA, 2011, 2015) has attempted to merge student learning more closely with national economic ambitions in an effort to meet market interests. For example, this ambition can be seen clearly in one of supporting policy documents supporting this reform which states that those '…who enter higher education in the coming decades are the job creators, policy-makers, social innovators and business leaders of the future…and the productive engine of a vibrant and prosperous economy' (DES, 2011, p.53). To achieve its purpose, the thesis attempted to explore students' experiences and perceptions of learning under recent curriculum reform. This objective was achieved by entering into an Irish post-primary school and working alongside pupils in a co-operative research study to examine the extent to which students' outlooks towards learning conform to, or deviate from market-driven aims and outcomes. A key aim of research process was to encourage participating students to think about assumptions and biases which may exist within their educational experiences, while also questioning the purpose of learning itself. The next section will provide a formal introduction to the first chapter.

1.3 Research Rationale

The rationale underpinning this thesis was informed, in general, by the philosophical tradition of critical theory and realized through the applied method of critical pedagogy. The term 'critical', in this sense, draws its meaning from the Frankfurt School of sociology who used it to indicate a stance which is critical of the established social order. By extension, individuals who are informed by this tradition feel duty bound to liberate themselves and others from the dominant logic of the status quo (Moore, 2013). In relation to this thesis, the foregoing outlook was characterized by the belief that the critical educator '…has a historical duty to play, awakening society through critical education of the people' (Nikolakaki, 2012, p.12). Kincheloe (1991) explains that teacher researchers inspired by critical theory seek to explore the way in which participants' views of educational reality are constructed. This orientation is

based on the belief that students should be able to freely choose how and why they learn but that to achieve this goal requires critical questioning in schooling. Drawing upon the above tradition, this research was concerned with how the choices made by students about their learning are informed through the ideologically constructed expectations that take place within schooling. This logic is captured well in the words of Giroux (1981, p.167) who explains that in order for students to understand how ideology affects their learning '…means not only [for them] to understand how the forces of cultural reproduction operate in schools but also how schools function as part of the larger social totality'. Building upon this premise, the thesis argued that much of what students learn in schooling is designed to meet the needs and interests of a dominant ideology. By extension, this position also claims that the development of curricula and syllabi does not take place in a vacuum, but instead, forms part of a socially constructed process. Accordingly, critical educators hope to realize a different conception of education, which is captured in the Greek notion of *paideia* and can be understood as:

> An all-round civic education that involves a life-long process of character development, absorption of knowledge and skills and – more significant – practicing a 'participatory' kind of active citizenship, that is a citizenship in which political activity is not seen as a means to an end but an end in itself (Fotopoulos, 2012, p.83).

In order to achieve this vision, critical educators believe that education should create the conditions in which people can free themselves of imposed ideological norms, particularly those which place capital gain over civic development. For this reason, references to academic literature from the tradition of critical theory will be made throughout the discussion. These references will offer a clear representation of the researcher's social, political and value positions in relation to the thesis and the design behind the research methods and methodology that were used. Further details about these critical principles will be provided in a later chapter which outlines a theoretical framework for the research study which was carried out as part of this thesis.

The philosophy of education outlined above is primarily informed by the work of Paulo Freire (1970; 1972; 1978; 1985; 1996; 1997). Freire's outlook on education was framed by the epistemological position of constructivism, which asserts that all learning takes place within a social domain that is controlled by dominant ideological assumptions. This position claims that how we come to know is deeply shaped by how we perceive the world around us and so an approach to pedagogy is required which can liberate individuals from the social conditions which determine these perceptions. To achieve this aim, Freire, in his best-known work (1972), champions an approach to education which is built upon the joint construction of knowledge between students and teachers. This approach to learning empowers students to engage with their own realities and in so doing, recognize the norms which have been imposed upon them. Although Freire's work was developed within a specific demographic context, his teachings have universal applicability. If one were to replace the words 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' with '…an educational system corrupted by free market principles' and 'students as forms of human capital', then the link between his writings and the proposed research becomes very apparent (Freire, 1972, p. 58).

Drawing upon Freire's writings, the research conducted within this thesis supports the view that education is not a neutral process and that what is learned in school can have direct implications for the educational decisions which students make thereafter. For example, the way students view their learning informs both the subject choices that they will make and the career choices which they will pursue. By extension, the way that learning takes place in schooling holds important implications for both students themselves and society at large (Downes, 2007). Given that the New Junior Cycle was introduced in 2011, it is perhaps unsurprising that the body of literature documenting the changes brought about under this curriculum reform is relatively small. However, it is worth noting that the research which has been conducted relating to this reform has almost exclusively focused upon quantitative shifts

in exam results; rather than qualitative changes in students' experiences. Studies which did gather information involving students' opinions used strictly conventional methods of data collection (NCCA, 2011; Flynn, 2013; 2017). To date, there have been no studies in Ireland which have involved students directly in the process of exploring this curriculum reform. For these reasons, it was deemed necessary to explore the extent to which students' views and decisions about their learning were informed by dominant ideological interests, as outlined in recent policy documents surrounding post-primary curriculum design. Therefore, the rationale for a piece of research that sought to capture these views was jusitifed when considering the significant implications of such national reform.

The philosophy of education outlined in this thesis is best described by Paulo Freire (1970, p.87) as a 'practice of freedom' which can be used by educators to raise critical awareness in students, thereby helping them to re-perceive their own reality. Thus, in order to explore the perceived outcomes of recent curriculum reform, an empirical research study was carried out which attempted to implement the pedagogical teachings of Freire (1970; 1972; 1978; 1985; 1996; 1997) in a school based context. The aim of this research study was to assist participating students in exploring the ideological assumptions and values which underpinned their experiences of learning during completion of the New Junior Cycle. A staunch critic of capitalist ideology within education, Freire encouraged students to question their learning experiences, thereby assisting them in recognizing the '…connections between their individual problems and experiences and the social contexts in which they are embedded' (Freire, 1978, p.38). The research attempted to achieve this objective by providing current and future generations of students with an avenue toward understanding and questioning the ideological factors that informed their experiences of learning in schooling. Having completed this research, it is now hoped that the findings that were produced may be used to start a dialogue about student autonomy when it comes to the learning choices which pupils make in schooling.

It is also hoped that this study will contribute to an ongoing dialogue within professional learning about whether or not the curricular outcomes of schooling can be driven by more than national economic interests. Lastly, it is hoped that the findings generated from this study can generate a critical discussion in the area of curriculum design, while also contributing to future development of policies relating to teacher training. The next section will outline the research questions that were used to frame and guide the thesis.

1.4 Research Questions

Having stated the rationale for this thesis, it is appropriate here to explicitly state the questions which the research sought to answer and then elaborate on those questions as a navigational guide through the chapters which will follow. The main research question which this thesis attempted to answer was:

> • Could an applied Freirean approach to pedagogic inquiry assist students in recognizing any assumptions or biases which underpin learning in schooling?

The specific sub-research questions this thesis sought to answer were as follows:

> • In what ways did ideologies impact upon curriculum in Western schooling during the twentieth century?

> • What ideological shifts have occurred in Irish secondary schooling over the past thirty years?

> • To what extent, if any, have ideological shifts in Irish secondary schooling impacted upon the lower-second level curriculum development within this time frame?

> • What are students' perceptions of learning under recent curriculum reform?

Before continuing, it is appropriate to allow for an elaboration of each sub-research question in order to outline the sequential process of inquiry which leads to and results in the primary research question that the thesis hoped to address.

The first question sought to build an important theoretical platform upon which the remainder of the thesis could develop and flow. It hoped to achieve this by providing a historical overview of three major ideological traditions in the twentieth century and the impact of each upon curriculum in schooling. In doing so, a wide theoretical window was constructed through which changes in Irish education could be viewed and understood.

The second question looked at ideological changes which have occurred in Irish secondary education over the past thirty years. This exploration was achieved by framing these changes in schooling within the broader political-economic backdrop of Irish society during this time frame. By examining the development of ideological shifts in this way, a fluid progression could be followed, which provided a contextual understanding of both historical and recent changes within second-level schooling. This question formed the basis upon which subsequent research questions and ideas underpinning the thesis would follow.

The third question hoped to explore the extent to which changes in the lower-second level curriculum had been shaped by ideological developments in secondary education over the past thirty years. The question hoped to chart the exact progression and impact of these changes within the curriculum, by dividing them into clear sub-sections. As such, this question also sought to establish if recent changes to the lower secondary curriculum follow part of an ideological trend in Irish schooling. In so doing, it is hoped to create a platform upon which the impact of this reform upon students' experiences of learning in post-primary schooling can be investigated.

The fourth question attempted to examine the effects of recent curriculum reform upon secondary students' perceptions of learning in schooling. To achieve this aim, a school-based empirical study was carried out as part of the thesis, which involved the participation of students who had recently completed the New Junior Cycle. This study explored students'

views about learning in schooling and the extent to which these views informed their anticipated subject choices and career paths. It was hoped that through this investigation, patterns would begin to emerge which show a positive or negative correlation between ideological trends in schooling and students' experiences of learning under curriculum reform.

The final question explored the experiences of student participants in relation to their role within the research project and the extent to which this process impacted upon their view of learning in schooling before, during and after their involvement in the research process. This question was framed around an empirical study which attempted to embed the pedagogical principles of Paulo Freire within an approach of co-operative inquiry, by working alongside a small number of students as assistant researchers.

Understood concurrently, the first three research questions were explored at a theoretical level, while the remaining inquiries were tested empirically. This mixed approach to research inquiry facilitated a later discussion between the literature reviewed and the data collected in order to produce a theoretical synthesis. These questions were returned to throughout the thesis in order to ensure that it retained both direction and focus toward achieving the primary research objective. The next section will provide a brief outline of the primary outcome which the research completed as part of this thesis hoped to achieve.

1.5 Study Aims and Objectives

The primary objective of this research was to explore whether a process of co-operative inquiry (Heron and Reason, 2006), informed by the principles of critical pedagogy, could assist students in exploring the ideological assumptions which underpinned both their learning and that of their peers under curriculum reform. To achieve this goal, a methodological approach of co-operative inquiry was undertaken, working with students as assistant researchers. Therefore, a secondary aim of this study was to reflect upon the success of this methodological approach and record students' experience of the research process. By exploring the views of

both the assistant researchers and their peers in this way, thinking processes were captured which revealed the views of students when discussing their experience of learning under Junior Cycle curriculum reform. The next section will outline the research methodology that was used to collect and analyse student views, as outlined above.

1.6 Research methodology

Most approaches within qualitative research attempt to observe, rather than change the conditions and lives of those who are under study (McNiff, 2014). However, for the purpose of this study, a critical qualitative approach was used, which sought to go beyond a general exploration of participants' lives and enters into the area of change and development (Carspecken, 1996). To this degree, the study attempted to '…overcome the limitations of traditional qualitative research in which the subjects only contribute the action to be studied, towards an approach in which all those involved work together' (Heron and Reason, 2006, p.2). This choice of methodology involved students working as assistant researchers in a study which explored the effects of curriculum reform upon both their own learning and that of their peers. The overall extent to which participants were involved as assistant researchers in the project is detailed in the fifth chapter, which outlines the thesis research methodology. The next section will explain how the remainder of the thesis will be structured chapter-by-chapter. Such a structure should provide the reader with an insight into, through and beyond the thesis as a whole.

1.7 Thesis Structure

The second chapter will seek to frame recent curriculum reform in the Republic of Ireland by providing a historical overview of ideology in curriculum, through the lens of three dominant Western perspectives in the past century. The chapter will attempt to develop the perspective of one tradition and outline the way in which its theoretical tenets could be applied to recent

ideological changes in Irish schooling under Junior Cycle reform. In doing so, it hoped to answer the first research question outlined above at a theoretical level.

The third chapter was used to frame the research context of the thesis by providing a historical overview of perceived ideological shifts in post-primary Irish schooling. Using key time frames, this chapter sought to develop a clear pathway which lead towards the discussion of recent changes within lower Irish secondary curriculum reform. To achieve this, the chapter looked at the introduction of policy developments; regulatory bodies and structural changes within Irish secondary education over the past three decades.

The fourth chapter provides a theoretical framework for the empirical research study that was carried out as part of the thesis. This framework was built around key principles within the traditions of both critical theory and pedagogy. These principles offer the reader an insight into the philosophical values which underpinned the study and how they were used to inform the research design.

The fifth chapter outlines the proposed research methodology for the empirical study and explains the choice of approach and data analysis that were used. Included in this chapter are explanations for the choice of research location; researchers and participants that were chosen for the study. This chapter also details the way in which data was collected; transcribed and the ethical implications of including a specific group of participants in the research study.

The sixth chapter presents the findings which were generated by the empirical research study. It builds upon the preceding chapter by outlining the results which emerged from the study and showing how they compared with the findings that were anticipated prior to its completion. This presentation included an outline of the key findings which emerged from the study and also the secondary data that was produced. These findings provided a basis to address the penultimate research question outlined in the previous section.

The seventh chapter described the findings which emerged from the research process itself. The function of this chapter was to describe how the views presented by student researchers developed over the course of the co-operative research project. This process was done in accordance with the five principles of critical qualitative research, drawn from work of Carspecken (1996).

The eight chapter sought to consolidate the entire thesis by discussing the findings from the foregoing chapters in line with both the research questions and the literatures reviewed in chapters two and three. The goal of this discussion was to highlight the need for a pedagogy in which students learn to develop a more critical understanding of the factors which influence their learning. This goal would be realised if both the implicit and explicit functions of learning are made available to all students both within the mainstream secondary classroom and beyond.

The final chapter marks the conclusion of this thesis. It reviewed the entire thesis from curricular changes in Irish secondary education, to the literatures of the hidden curriculum. It briefly re-states the work outlined in each chapter and finishes with comments on the need for critical action in educational policy development. This is particularly relevant in an Irish context, as so little has been done in this regard with respect to the post-primary classroom.

1.8 Original Contribution

This thesis attempted to provide an original contribution to academic knowledge by adopting a research approach which is built upon the traditions of both critical theory and pedagogy. The research which is conducted as part of this thesis will represent a modest attempt to develop the body of knowledge which has been established by previous studies that have been carried out using critical approaches to educational research. Specifically, this research will attempt to add to the literature surrounding Irish secondary education; critical qualitative research and

Irish curriculum policy development. The research carried out as part of this thesis hopes to add to this literature in the following ways:

- It will attempt to challenges the assumptions underpinning curriculum policy development in Ireland by employing a critical research approach to data collection and analysis with students.

- It will attempt to add to the literature on critical pedagogy by extending its principle tenets to the secondary classroom via direct action research with students.

- It will attempt to add to the educational literature on co-operative inquiry with children by providing adolescent students with the opportunity to participate in a critically designed research process.

It is upon this basis that the researcher set out to devise a critical methodological research approach which could be realised with school children. Drawing upon the ideas and models of critical theorists, a qualitative model was devised which could be employed with students in a school-based context. It was anticipated that this model would include student participants as assistant researchers in the context of a school based empirical study. It was hoped that the inclusion of these students as researchers would contribute to understanding the extent to which secondary pupils are cognizant of the wider socio-political factors which inform their learning and how these factors affect their subject decisions based upon their experience of curriculum reform. It is hoped that this study will succeed in generating evidence of how wider, systemic changes have impacted on the development of second-level curricula in the Republic of Ireland and how these changes inform students perceptions' of learning and related subject decisions.

1.9 Conclusion

As previously stated, the rationale for this thesis was principally borne out of the social theory which are set out in the writings of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator. His legacy in education has been certified for more than half a century since the publication of his landmark text (1972).

Freire's status resulted from the transformative ideas which he developed in response to the issues he perceived in the existing social order. He developed these theories in response to early ideological attempts to utilize education as an instrument for social control and oppression. In doing so, he challenged capitalist approaches to learning by creating a vision for education which was underpinned by the principles of resistance and the object of freedom. Freire stands out as the most significant educator to anticipate the dangers of market logic in education. Writing at a time in which free-market ideas had just begun to merge with post-industrial changes in labour, Freire both forewarned against and challenged the commodification of knowledge as a concept in education. Looking at the existing state of affairs in Western education and schooling today, it is not difficult to see how many of the worrying outcomes which he predicted have since been be normalized in our present society. For example, social inequalities; class division and competitive logic in the form of league tables and high-stakes exams all form part of the normal mainstay of schooling as it exists today. Moreover, these conditions are celebrated as being victories, rather than failures of the system of learning which most Western societies hold in place. This is to say that mainstream curricula within organized education no longer supports the objectives of human development or theoretical discovery. Rather, they stand as overarching pillars which are used to generate human capital for the global economy. Therefore, the decision to build upon and extend Freire's ideas is justified in writing a thesis which attempts to address the same issues of ideologically-driven learning in education which he sought to resist. In view of this reality, it is it is believed that Freire's method for counter-active thinking is more relevant now more than it was at its first point of publication. Consequently, it is strongly believed that his social theory has an important role to play in challenging market-led education by assisting students to recognize and question the purpose of their learning in schooling. To achieve this goal, later chapters will outline a theoretical framework which are oriented around the socio-philosophical traditions of critical theory and

pedagogy. This conceptual framework will be used to directly inform the research design and approach that will be adopted in the empirical study which is carried out as part of this thesis.

This chapter has outlined the overall rationale behind the thesis, how this motivation informs the research questions that were developed and the methods chosen in order to answer these questions. This description included a clear account of both the research methodology which has been chosen for the empirical study and a step-by-step breakdown of the function which each chapter will play in the overall thesis. The next chapter will provide a historical overview of curriculum as a concept and the various components which function together to comprise of this idea as a whole. In particular, it will look at the assumptions and beliefs which accompany the outlooks of various ideological traditions toward curriculum in Western schooling. This theoretical exploration will provide an important framework toward understanding how ideological developments have impacted upon Irish secondary education and shaped learning through curriculum reform in later chapters.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a historical overview on the impact of ideology on curriculum within Western schooling in the twentieth century. To achieve this exploration, the chapter will specifically look at how the concept of curriculum has been considered from the perspective of three major ideological traditions, namely: the functionalist; liberal and Neo-Marxist perspectives. In relation to the research questions posed in the opening chapter, this chapter allows for a smooth entry to the main research focus by using the concepts of ideology and curriculum as a theoretical window through which the reader can understand how student learning is shaped by the assumptions and beliefs of dominant traditions in schooling. As such, the section will begin with a brief discussion of ideology as a concept and the implications which it holds, not only for the subjects under discussion within this thesis, but also for individuals hoping to conduct research and research itself. This exposition acts as an important premise upon which the rest of the arguments within this thesis will be built. Next, the chapter will continue with a general exploration of curriculum as an educational concept. It will look at how this term originated and outline the different components which comprise this idea as a theoretical concept. This discussion will serve to highlight a central point, namely, that curriculum as a concept consists of both explicit and implicit aspects which need to be identified and explored separately from one another. From there, the section will examine different viewpoints on the role of curriculum in education from the perspective of the three aforementioned major ideological traditions within the twentieth century, beginning first with a focus on this concept at an explicit level. Once having examined the role of curriculum within education as it has been understood, explicitly, succeeding sections will look at the function of this concept in the foregoing traditions, at an implicit level, through an exploration of the hidden curriculum. This historical approach will establish a theoretical background in which

the ideological shifts underpinning Junior Cycle curriculum reform in Ireland can be later situated and understood in relation to their present function in Irish post-primary schooling. By approaching the discussion in this way, this chapter hopes to establish an important theoretical context in which to frame a later discussion around recent curriculum reform within Irish schooling. In order to achieve this aim, the next section will first begin by providing a general overview of ideology as a concept, in order to create a clear pathway through which this idea can be discussed in relation to education and schooling.

2.2. Ideology

The term 'ideology' derives from a compound of two Greek terms, *idea* and *logos*, which together refer to a 'compilation of forms' (Freeden, 1996). In the most general sense, ideology as a concept functions as a categorical term, which is used to describe the ways in which an idea or institution is informed by particular systems of belief (Freeden, 2003). Moreover, ideology is also employed as an encompassing term to describe the ways in which particular political-religious systems operate and the values which people within such belief systems espouse (Heywood, 2017). It is important to note that ideology is also a contested term which can be both used and interpreted as either a positive or negative adjective, depending on the personal convictions of the individual, organization or country in question (Pinar, 2009). For the purpose of this thesis, the terms 'ideology' and 'ideological' can be simply defined and understood to refer to the 'beliefs, attitudes and opinions' which are unique to particular outlooks on the world (Martin, 2015, p.1).

In relation to research, ideology serves as a useful term which can be used to explore and describe the beliefs that are implicit within the policies and structures of public institutions in any given context (Zajda, 2015). However, it is pertinent to note that researchers themselves may operate upon certain ideological assumptions or collect data which is constructed within

particular ideological domains (Kinloch and Mohan, 2000). Consequently, it is important that researchers remain aware of their own ideological dispositions and are careful to acknowledge the ways in which these biases may shape or influence their outlook toward research (Roulston, 2001). In relation to the thesis at hand, it is also pertinent to recognize that what is learned in schooling is often linked to wider national and social factors, which need to be unpacked and addressed (Tripp, 1990). It is for these reasons that the majority of this chapter will be given to showing how ideology has shaped student learning by looking at its impact upon curriculum within Western schooling during the twentieth century. The next section will provide a short account of curriculum as it has traditionally been understood within Western education and schooling.

2.3 Curriculum

The term 'curriculum' dates back to the early 19th century and stems from the Latin term *currere*, meaning 'to run' (Pinar, 2004). As an educational concept, curriculum has since gained meaning as an educational structure which shapes the lived human experience and assists citizens in understanding the nature and purpose of their society (Pinar, 1975). Since its formation within education, the idea of curriculum has come to assume a pivotal role in the development of societies on an international scale, both in relation to the cultivation of sociological norms and the development of economic prosperity, amongst other aspects of public life. For Pinar (2004), the concept of curriculum is inextricably tied to the field of curriculum theory i.e. the assumptions and beliefs which support curricula in serving specific functions and achieving particular outcomes. In particular, there have been a number of major traditions which have come to dominate the field of curriculum theory, as later sections will detail. Key disputes within this field typically centre around the function of curriculum; the outcomes of learning and the means through which results are achieved. These divergences are captured well in the words of Egan (2003, pp.9-10) who notes that,

> at a superficial level, confusion about what curriculum is, and thus what people concerned with it should do, involves argument about whether curriculum subsumes instruction—and thus whether a student of curriculum should also be a student of instructional methods—or whether curriculum involves all learning experiences, or refers simply to a blueprint for achieving restricted objectives in a school setting.

As this excerpt suggests, outlooks on the function of curriculum are multifarious and are generally informed by the different socio-political beliefs that are held at a national level i.e. perspectives on curriculum may vary, depending on whether a country is predominantly conservative or liberal in its attitude toward public services. As a result, it is appropriate to note here that in relation to organized learning, '…all schools serve the societies in which they are embedded' and therefore may vary greatly in their implementation of curriculum (Ayers et al., 2017, p.39). Linked to this point, it is important to recognize that curriculum design is not a neutral process, but rather, it is an approach which directly includes the values and interests of those involved in the development of official documentation e.g. circular reports; policy papers and mandates relating to teacher practice. As one author aptly notes,

> policy documents invariably include ideology, assumptions and values, and are not simply neutral apolitical and amoral texts. They have something profound to say about how the curriculum and the teacher are (re)positioned, and the expected relation in governance between, for instance, the state, the school and the public, as well as being an expression for a specific dominant ideology (Mooney-Simmie, 2014, p.189).

This position underscores the point that what is learned in schooling is not objective or value free, a view which is often contrary to the claims of those who design and implement curriculum policies. This is a central point which acts as an important frame of reference for later chapters which focus upon curriculum development within a specific national context.

In addition to the array of complexities indicated above, curriculum may also be understood as a multi-layered phenomenon which consists of several component parts. Thus, one of the key difficulties in discussing a term as educationally significant as 'curriculum' is the specificity which is required in order to provide clear understanding about which aspect of this concept is being referred to. As such, it is important to unpack the different aspects which together function to form this concept. Kelly (2004) notes that this term broadly consists of three

different components, which he has termed the 'planned'; 'null' and 'hidden' aspects of curriculum. Elaborating upon this description, Kridel (2003, p.657) defines the planned curriculum as '…those documents which shape the content to be covered when teaching'. Examples of such documents are those which arise out of policy environments and express what is deemed necessary for students to learn at specific levels of education. Moreover, the planned curriculum is typically concerned, not only with specific subject content, but also how such content is taught and why (Boomer, 2005). This aspect of curriculum is tied to decisions relating to how content is assessed; examined and the overall goals which this process is designed to achieve. By contrast, Eisner (1985, p.107) describes the null curriculum as '…those subjects, pedagogies and experiences from which all students or certain groups of students are systematically excluded'. This is to suggest that the null curriculum is defined by the subject content and skills which is absent within student learning, as distinct from to the inclusion of other select forms of information which they receive. Lastly, the hidden curriculum, at its most basic, can be defined as that which refers to the '…unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn in school' (Abbott, 2014, p. 67). This aspect of the curriculum will be looked at in more detail in the sections succeeding this general description. Viewed in this way, the term 'curriculum' can be understood as a variegated concept which contains both clear and hidden elements which jointly form a structure of what students learn; how they learn and why they learn. It is important to note here that curricular frameworks do not take place within a vacuum and therefore, divergent gaps can emerge between theoretical ideals and experiential outcomes. The next section will look at the concept of curriculum in the first of three major traditions of the twentieth century.

2.3.1 Functionalist Tradition

Though no longer a dominant theory, functionalism was one of the most prevalent modes of sociological thinking in the USA, Western Europe and Japan until the early 1970s (Sato, 2011). Generally understood, this perspective holds the theoretical position that society is made up of many components which work together in tandem in order to create structure (Gerber, 2010). These components include cultural phenomena such as language; religion; morals; beliefs and education on an individual basis to identify the function they fulfil toward the maintenance of the whole (Hart, 1998). To achieve a broad perspective on societies in general, functionalists analyse the individual components of a given society on an individual level in order to gain a broader understanding of how each of these parts operate in relation to the needs of the broader whole (Mooney, 2008). As a result, those who uphold a functionalist view are not typically concerned with individual actions as they believe that the root sources of social behaviour can be understood by looking at the ways in which societies are socially constructed (Macionis, 2012).

In relation to schooling, early sociological research on curriculum theory within this tradition '…focused on the role which the curriculum played in maintaining social order and stability through schooling' (Skelton, 1997, p.178). Important works in the functionalist tradition were written by a number of key theorists (Durkheim, 1925; Parsons, 1951; Jackson, 1968; Dreeben, 1968). The works of these twentieth century authors are now generally referred to under the collective heading of 'consensus theory', due to their collective focus on gathering and describing social phenomena within schooling, rather than directly engaging with empirical concerns, such as individual agency (Skelton, 2006). In relation to the concept of curriculum, functionalism holds a traditional approach, which emphasizes a practical focus upon '…factual subject matter content and formal instruction' (LeRiche, 1993, p.146). Moreover, there is an acceptance in the functionalist tradition that the majority of people internalize the curriculum

within schooling, both explicitly and implicitly. As a result, the human ability to impose choices upon others or society is removed; as individual agency becomes secondary to the social influence of schooling (Wilson, 2011). The next section will unpack the concept of curriculum within the tradition of liberalism.

2.3.2 Liberal Tradition

Still a prevalent theory, liberalism has been a dominant tradition in large parts of Europe since the eighteenth century (Kelly, 2015). Simply defined, liberalism can be understood as a political philosophy which seeks to maximize the autonomy of all members in a society by limiting the social restrictions which inhibit them (Lehto, 2015). Contrary to functionalist perspective, liberals place the individual at the centre of society with the core goal of enabling them to reach their fullest potential (Chau, 2009). In relation to schooling, liberals (e.g. Sharp, 1980; Stanworth, 1981) have highlighted the limitations of functionalist thinking, arguing that that this perspective fails to treat schools as more than neutral institutions which provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to perform in wider society.

Beginning in the early twentieth century, the premise behind liberal education is centred around a concern for how the everyday reality of the individual is shaped through social norms and values (Smith, 2002). The central values underpinning liberal beliefs toward education are exemplified in the work of Newman (1852, p.110) who envisioned a system of learning which would instil in people, '…a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life'. For liberals, this view of human beings as active subjects replaced the functionalist outlook in which people were portrayed as passive bearers of predefined societal roles (Giroux, 1981). This critique formed the basis for a sociology of education which attempts to interrogate the relationship between schools and the industrial order (Giroux, 1983). The liberal perspective towards schooling instead seeks to explain '…dialectical relationship between access to power and the process by

which the availability of such categories to some groups enable them to assert power and control over others' (Young, 1971). This critique would suggest that theorists who view the hidden effects of schooling as an inevitable by-product of government interests may be challenged for their failure to call into question the socializing effects of schools as institutions. As the liberal movement progressed, it became concerned with how schooling could be made available to everyone with the overall purpose of developing a universal culture (Paterson, 2015). Accordingly, within the liberal tradition, schools were seen as a means through which the '…disadvantaged and dispossessed may gain access to status, if not political and economic power' (Giroux, 1981, p.2). In this way, the liberal perspective has become distinct for its '…adherence to the belief that all people not only have the same rights but also belong to the same culture and could be judged by the same standards everywhere, at all times' (Paterson, 2015, p.199). Expanding upon this view, contemporary proponents of liberal education have argued it could serve a universal purpose by collectively preparing students to rise above their limitations (Jennings, 2002). Central to this goal within liberal education is the role of curriculum which serves as an organized structure for the content and processes through which the tradition can fulfil its social objectives. In the words of Kushner (1999, p.415),

> Curriculum is a fundamental element of the liberal educational tradition, in terms both of the content and pedagogy that are included and those that are left out. Certain things belong: traditional liberal arts subjects, such as fine arts, humanities and natural sciences, general study of the social sciences, and a pedagogy that favours small class learning.

Expanding upon this point, it is important to note that liberal education is more concerned with the purpose of curriculum and the methods through which it is implemented, than with the actual content that is learned at a classroom level (Robinson, 1979). This is to suggest that content may take many forms within liberal education, but this learning is underpinned by a common curriculum that attempts to cultivate a particular set of skills, values and attitudes. In this way, the liberal approach to curriculum differs from its functionalist counterpart in that it seeks to establishes a common framework in which individuals learn to develop their values

and also how to relate to others within a society (Crittenden, 2006). In the words of Newman, (p.487), '…the first step in attaining this desirable end is that you should submit yourselves to a curriculum of studies'. The next section will unpack the concept of curriculum within the neo-Marxist tradition.

2.3.3 Neo-Marxist Tradition

As the twentieth century progressed, a 'New Left' political movement began to emerge across both the USA and the UK in the 1960s which sought to challenge and rebuke many aspects of society (Feenberg, 2010). This movement was largely influenced by the neo-Marxist tradition of critical theory which holds the belief that all aspects of public life take place within a social domain that is controlled and shaped by the dominant ideology of capitalism (Held, 1980). It is appropriate to note here that a distinction exists between the terms 'Marxist' and 'neo-Marxist'. The former refers to the classical Marxist belief that the class struggle between rich and poor has defined the course of human history, while the latter takes this principle and extends it more broadly include other issues, such as education; gender and race (McLaren and Jaramillo, 2010). Accordingly, it is pertinent to note that although Marx and Engels (1867) did not write extensively about education, they advanced important outlooks on contemporary societies which have since been used by neo-Marxists to question and re-imagine the function of schooling in society (Kellner, 2001). Building upon the ideas of these progenitors, later neo-Marxist thinkers (Freire, 1972; Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1992) developed these concepts and methods to challenge the role of learning in the reproduction of capitalist societies and to promote alternative forms of curricular instruction within schooling. These thinkers put forward the argument that a distinction exists between education and schooling. They argue that schooling functions as a social vehicle which functions to support the ideology of capitalism and thereby inhibits the pursuit of liberation, which they claim is the true aim of education (Nikolakaki, 2012). The neo-Marxist tradition functions in contrast to both the

functionalist and liberal traditions, whose conceptualization of educational theory, it argues, either downplays or ignores notions of conflict and struggle in the discourse of traditional educational theory and practice (Giroux, 1980). Consequently, this perspective is primarily concerned with challenging the role that schooling plays in serving dominant ideological interests (Giroux, 1988). Linked to this point, thinkers who assume a critical perspective seek to question the relationship between schooling and the workplace (Giroux, 1988). Such thinkers attempt to achieve this goal by conducting a critical exploration of ideology within schooling, in order to unpack the impact of learning on students' experiences. In particular, these theorists attempt to examine how schooling reproduces social disadvantage, particularly in relation to social, racial, and gender inequalities, and how these forms of inequity are linked to economic outcomes at a national level (Doganay and Sari, 2009). To challenge this state of affairs, theorists within the critical tradition argue that by design, learning in schooling, ought to be attuned to the individual context of students; cultivate a sense of social awareness, and teach learners how to challenge perceived problems in the world (Mulcahy, 2009). This perspective toward learning is captured well in the words of Shor (1992, p.16) who observes that in the neo-Marxist tradition,

> A curriculum designed to empower students must be transformative in nature and help students to develop the knowledge, skills and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political, and economic actions.

This approach to curriculum development endeavours to hone students with the ability to think in the opposite direction of mainstream schooling by questioning the taken for granted assumptions which underpin their learning. In this way, Shor (1992) highlights how the critical perspective toward learning differs from its functionalist and liberal counterparts in that it actively seeks to integrate and explore the effects of ideology on learning and is skeptical of traditions which either ignore, accept or promote the dominant values which are used to sustain social inequalities through learning in schooling. As later sections will detail, the principal thinker whose work called into question the socializing effects of education systems within a

capitalist framework was Freire (1972) who devised a pedagogical model to challenge and counteract the dominant values and beliefs that are transmitted to students through their learning. As one author succinctly observes:

> Traditional education orients students to conform, to accept inequality and their places in the status quo, to follow authority. Freirean critical education invites students to question the system they live in and the knowledge being offered them, to discuss what kind of future they want, including the right to elect authority and to remake the school and society they find. (Shor 1993, p. 28)

As this excerpt suggests, those who advocate Freirean approaches to education hope to empower students through a process of independent thinking and questioning, resulting in freedom to create the world in terms of their own ideals, rather than those which have been prescribed for them. It is important to note here, however, that this perspective is also underpinned by a variety of ideological assumptions and does not therefore does not uphold a form of learning which is free from bias, any more than the traditions which it criticizes (Tubbs, 2005). However, unlike these traditions, proponents of the critical perspective are clear in their position that learning is not a neutral process and for this reason they seek explicate and critique the ideological norms implicit within other traditions, while also putting forward their own conception of education and schooling. The next section will examine the hidden curriculum as a historical educational concept and showcase the ways in which dominant ideologies take place within student learning.

2.4 Hidden Curriculum

The hidden curriculum is a historical educational concept which has many competing definitions (Jackson, 1968; Vallance, 1974; McLaren, 1981). However, this concept is generally characterized by the '…concealed attitudes, norms, and beliefs and values that take place within student learning and which are usually expressed through rules, rituals and regulations' (Seddon, 1983, p.3). This concept has been considered from the perspective of the

three aforementioned major socio-political traditions, which will be outlined in the following sections.

2.4.1 Functionalist Tradition

The first key theorist to write about the hidden curriculum from a functionalist perspective was Durkheim (1925). Though he did not explicitly employ the term 'hidden curriculum', it is generally accepted that the experiences which Durkheim (1925) described match the definition of this concept. In his own words, Durkheim (1925, p.148) stated that the system of school rules,

> predetermine the child's conduct. He must come to class regularly, arrive at a specified time, and not disrupt things in class…it is through the practice of school discipline that we can inculcate the spirit of discipline in the child.

In this way, it has been observed that for Durkheim, more is learned in schools than what is specified in the formal curriculum or textbooks used in classrooms (Kentli, 2009). To this end, Durkheim (1956, p.70) concluded that '…education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning, the essential similarities collective life demands'. The functionalist perspective toward the sociological implications of schooling was developed by Parsons (1951), who argued the primary forces of socialization in society were family and education which conspired together to maintain social stability. He posited that schools serve as an important link between family and wider society by preparing students for future adult roles in the world. In his own words, Parsons (1951, p.168) argued that there is '…a sense in which the school system is a microcosm of the adult occupational world, and experience in it is a main field of operation of the second stage mechanisms of socialization'. Parsons similarly observed that as a general rule, people are judged in terms of what they achieve in society and suggested that schools exist to prepare us for this identity (1951). For example, he pointed to the fact that students' success in schooling is primarily underpinned by competitive principles which are later measured against social expectations when they leave

school i.e. their status as pupils is largely achieved through competitive examination against their peers, which is designed to prepare them for social life as adults (Dickerson, 2007). Though Parsons never explicitly used the term 'hidden curriculum' to describe the socializing effects of schooling, his contributions to this area provided an important sociological foundation for the work of later educational theorists who would develop this concept.

Following Parsons, the functionalist view toward the social norms in schooling was developed by Dreeben (1968) who suggested that the structures present in schools prepare students to participate in public life by inculcating them in the social norms of the dominant society. Wexler (2007, p.47) notes that the main difference in thought between these two individuals is that Parsons' (1959) functionalism focused directly on the school classroom whereas Dreeben '…specified what forms the behavioural ritual of reinforcing the specific normative order takes in the modern school'. Dreeben's main contention is that the social experiences available to pupils in school provided them with an opportunity to learn the norms of adult working life (1968). In this way, it has been suggested that Dreeben is more overt in his functionalism as he explicitly seeks to unpack the relationships between school and the workforce (Lynch, 1989). To this end, Dreeben (1968) identified four specific norms which are transmitted through the structures of schooling, namely: independence; achievement; universalism and specificity. Through these norms, he argued, schools attempt to cultivate a sense of responsibility in students and encourage them to behave in a way that is consistent with particular social expectations. Consequently, Dreeben (1968, p.147) suggested that these patterns of learning teach students to '…form transient social relationships, submerge much of their personal identity, and accept the legitimacy of categorical treatment'.

Building upon these early sociological explorations in schooling, the first attempt to expressly focus upon the hidden curriculum from a functionalist perspective began in the late 1960s with the work of Jackson (1968), and the origin of the concept itself. Jackson set out to '…surpass

the limited perspectives of learning theories in exploring the social complexity of classroom life' set out by functionalists before him (Lynch, 1989, p.1). Part of Jackson's rationale for his research approach was that that other functionalist perspectives had failed 'to come to grips with the reality of classroom events' (Jackson, 1968, p.59). For Jackson, the hidden curriculum could be divided into three component parts which he termed 'crowds, praise, and power' and used to describe, overcrowding in classrooms; uncertain allegiances between both teachers and students and the unequal status afforded to teachers over pupils (Jackson, 1968, pp. 33-34). From these observations, Jackson argued that the hidden curriculum emphasised skill-based learning with a particular focus on attributes such as waiting quietly; showing restraint; becoming co-operative; responding to authority and being punctual (1968). In this way, Jackson's research presented a challenge to earlier functionalist interpretations which supposedly explained the '…learning processes of schools by highlighting the contradictions between the social expectations of the hidden curriculum and the aspirations for individuals to realise their own potential' (Jackson, 1968, pp.35-37). Despite his early critique of the institutionalising effects of schooling, Jackson's analysis of the hidden curriculum continues to be labelled as functionalist because he tacitly accepted this phenomenon as social by-product which all people are required to go through (Skelton, 2006).

2.4.2 Liberal Tradition

In relation to the hidden curriculum, the liberal position differs from the functionalist tradition by '…questioning the taken-for-granted assumptions of daily school life' (Skelton, 2006). Liberal approaches to schooling set out to more deeply unpack the 'hidden' aspects of school life such as school rules; codes of discipline and teacher-student interactions. These practices also include '…the norms, values, and belief systems embedded in the curriculum, the school, and classroom life, imparted to students through daily routines, curricular content, and social relationships between teachers and students' (Margolis, 2001). In this way, liberals attempt to

expound the basis upon which '…everyday practices are based and describe the process of how these practices are created and maintained in classrooms' (Skelton, p.179). Giroux (2001) notes that the liberal perspective toward the hidden curriculum begins with an different understanding of the power relationships between social norms and behaviour in the classroom, as it rejects most top-to-bottom models of pedagogy. He adds that the liberal position rejects forms of learning '…which are uncritical in their treatment of socialization and perceive students as passive recipients of knowledge' (Giroux, 2001, p.50). Skelton (2006) supports this view in noting that considerable amount of liberal scholarship focuses on exposing the assumptions behind school practices. For example, he points to the fact that a number of studies have shown how teachers and students respond differently to the definitions of acceptable practice outlined by most schools as social institutions (Becker, 1970; Woods, 1981; Scarth, 1987). Skelton (2006, p.180) concludes that such studies are good examples of how the liberal perspective interprets the behaviour of people in a different regard by viewing them as '…active, purposeful creators of meaning rather than as passive receivers of social norms and values'.

The most noted theorist to champion a liberal perspective toward the hidden curriculum is Vallance (1974, p.13) who is cogent in her definition of this concept: '…I use the term to refer to those non-academic but educationally significant consequences of schooling that occur systematically but are not made explicit at any level of the public rationales for education'. In this way, she suggests that planned outcomes may be in place at a systemic level which are not made immediately apparent to those who learn them. Vallance (1980, p.27) has also added that '…the real value of the hidden curriculum concept as a tool for educational dialogue is that it allows us to acknowledge that much of schooling may be too subtle to ever capture'. This is an important point, as it recognizes that limitations exist when attempting to understand social norms within schooling and that efforts to do so may result in an oversimplification of student

behaviour (Giroux, 1983). A second noted writer to examine to hidden curriculum in schooling from a liberal perspective is Portelli (1993) who argues that there are three logical explanations for hidden norms within schooling which can be summarized as follows:

- Norms hide themselves

- Norms are intentionally embedded by an external party

- Norms are a by-product of social beliefs within schooling

Following this line of reasoning, Portelli (1993) observed that norms do not possess agency and cannot hide themselves, therefore leaving only the latter two variables as possibilities. However, the author noted, it is not possible to accurately explore the probability of either scenario, as limitations are caused by the assumptions and biases of the individual conducting the exploration i.e. what one person considers to be a negative outcome of schooling, another person may consider to be a positive outcome. A further liberal perspective worth noting towards the hidden curriculum can be found in the work of Gordon (1981) who cautions that whether or not norms take place intentionally in schooling, it is important for students to be made aware of them, as failure to do so could unduly influence their own assumptions and decisions relating to their education.

Economic developments account for many of the significant changes which have occurred within Western education and schooling over the past thirty years. These developments, have been largely shaped by the progressive growth of free-market, or neo-liberal economics in the international labour market. Within the context of education, neoliberalism attempts to embed the principles of free-market economics within public learning at all levels of study. Neo-liberal approaches to education seek to redefine knowledge and learning in terms of private economic interests i.e. quantifiable outcomes which can be used to generate an economic profit (Giroux, 1986). Consequently, it has become an unquestioned assumption within contemporary

curriculum design that the fundamental purpose of public learning is to produce the outcomes necessary to meet market-driven demands. This rationale toward learning can be traced to series of policies introduced by President Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher in the 1980s which marked a clear shift in the discourse and rationale underpinning Western educational practices. These policies sought to introduce structural reforms within schooling; a focus on improved standards in literacy and mathematics; regulation of teachers and an increase state power in education (Beauvallet, 2015). Additionally, the regime of both leaders was underpinned by the proliferation of technology in all aspects of public life, as a means of advancing their various political and economic reforms (Kalantzis-Cope and Gherab-Martin, 2010). It is important to highlight this development in liberal ideology, as it will have significant bearing in understanding the changes which have taken place in Irish secondary education over the past thirty years, including the rationale behind recent lower secondary curriculum reform.

2.4.3 Neo-Marxist Tradition

As previously noted, thinkers who assume a critical perspective within schooling are primarily concerned with challenging the role that learning plays in serving dominant ideological interests (Giroux, 1988). It is unsurprising, therefore, that this school of thought works in contrast to both the functionalist and liberal traditions, whose conceptualization of educational theory either disregarded or overlooked notions such as conflict and struggle in the discourse of traditional educational theory and practice (Giroux, 1980). By contrast, thinkers within the critical tradition attempt to explicate this link by adopting a critical exploration of how ideology shapes learning. Such theorists seek to examine how schooling reproduces social relations with regard to social, racial, and gender inequalities and their relation to the economy (Doganay and Sari, 2009). As such, proponents of this perspective on schooling seek to question the relationship between curriculum; learning and the workplace (Giroux, 1983). Consequently, it

can be observed that thinkers within this tradition (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Willis 1977, Apple 1980; 1986; McLaren 1981; Giroux 1981; 1983; 2012) are by far the most prolific writers on the hidden aspects of curriculum in schooling (Lynch, 1989).

The first theorists to pioneer a critical perspective towards the hidden curriculum were Bowles and Gintis (1976), who explicated the super-structural connection between capitalism and schooling. They argued against the structure of authority hidden in schooling and formed a thesis of 'structural correspondence' in which they highlighted the connection between the social norms embedded schooling and market driven interests (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p. 131). For these thinkers, the hidden curriculum can be found in the everyday features of school life which, they argued '…legitimate inequality through the ostensibly meritocratic manner by which they reward and promote students, and allocate them to distinct positions in the occupational hierarchy' (1976, p.11). This early perspective set a benchmark for the critical exploration of ideology within schooling by questioning the influence of dominant interests upon formalized learning.

Building upon this foundation, Apple (1979) sought to explore the issue of hegemony in schooling. For the purpose of this thesis, the term 'hegemony' can be understood as meaning '…a process in which dominant groups in society come together to form a bloc an sustain leadership over subordinate groups' (Apple, 1996, p.15). On this issue, Apple (1979, p.13) suggested that '…schools largely reflect the interests and aspirations of the most powerful groups and ignore those of the less powerful'. Consequently, he felt that a greater problematization of curricula was necessary so that the ideologies underpinning what students learn in schools could be revealed. In this way, Apple (1979, p.6) prompts educators and students to question 'whose knowledge is it? Who selected it? Why is it organized and taught in this way?' Apple (1986) later developed this perspective by describing how social reproduction occurs in schooling through the control of teachers and textbooks. He argues that

curriculum packages devised by state bodies serve to deskill rather than empower teachers and students, prompting him to pose further challenging questions about how power functions in schooling, asking, 'who benefits? In what ways? (Apple, 1986, p.12) Stemming from these critiques, Apple (1995, p. 16) has called for the development of a '…democratic curriculum which invites young people to shed the passive role of knowledge consumers and assume the active role of meaning makers'.

Building on the above, the next significant development within the critical tradition was provided by an ethnographic study. This study (Willis, 1977) involved a critical qualitative approach, which attempted to explore the socialization of working-class students through schooling and gather pupils' reacted against these social structures. In this study Willis observed how twelve 'lads' resisted the authority of the schooling system and developed their own 'counter-culture'. As Willis (1977, p.22-23) puts it:

> the school is the zone of the formal. It as a clear structure: the school building, school rules, pedagogic practice, a staff hierarchy with powers sanctioned by the state'. By contrast, 'counter-school culture is the zone of the informal. It is where the incursive demands of the formal are denied. The informal group is the basic unit of this culture, the fundamental and elemental source of its resistance.

In this way, he observed (1977) that it is not just structures within schooling that create class disadvantage but also how students resist such structures which determines their social outcome. When compared with the critical interpretation of the earlier thinkers in this tradition, it is apparent that Willis' reading of the relationship between capital and schooling goes beyond a simple economic rendering of the hidden curriculum by instead suggesting that it could be better understood through the observation of students' resistance to such ideological influences.

The critical perspective on schooling continued to be developed as the twentieth century progressed. Examples of these developments can be found in the work of McLaren (1986) whose conception of the hidden curriculum extends to study of how knowledge and learning are shaped outside of organized lessons or approved classroom resources. Using an alternative

expression, McLaren (1994, p.4) describes the implicit messages and effects communicated to students through schooling as 'ritual performance' rather than using the term 'hidden curriculum'. He defines ritual as '…a political event and part of the objectified distributions of school's dominant cultural capital (e.g. systems of meanings, taste, attitudes and norms which legitimate the existing social order)'. These ritual phenomena, he argues force '…students to comply with the dominant ideologies and social practices related to authority, behaviour and morality' (1989, p.184). In particular, McLaren (1986, p.175) emphasizes the role of the teacher in communicating ideological messages, stating that they alter,

> the behaviour of students from what they perceive as stubbornness and resistance into docile, and obedient behaviour which enables students to be easily conditioned to the mind-deadening and spirit-breaking norms of the factory, machine shop or fast food establishments.

In this way, McLaren's ethnographic research is firmly grounded in the critical notion that schools play a generative role in society by attempting to pre-determine students' positions in later life (1986).

Drawing on the theoretical basis established by the theorists outlined above, Giroux (Giroux and Penna, 1979, p.41) has reaffirmed the view that that schools '…mediate and legitimate the social and cultural reproduction of class, racial and gender relations in dominant society'. However, he has attempted to develop this position by arguing that most early critical research exploring the hidden aspects of schooling focused on explicating dominant ideologies in schooling, without any meaningful attempt to challenge or counteract these phenomena. Accordingly, he notes that '…the notion of resistance points to the need to understand more thoroughly the complex ways in which people mediate between their own lived experiences and structures of domination and constraint' (Giroux, 1983, p.108). Writing in the post-millennium context, Giroux has reiterated his beliefs about the ideological influence of neo-liberal capitalism but has since noted that '…what was once the hidden curriculum – the subordination of education to capital – has now become a much celebrated policy of both public

and higher education' (Giroux as cited in Nikolakaki, 2012, p.332). This is to suggest it is no longer disputed that schools attempt to embed ideologies in the learning of students through policy initiatives and curricular outcomes (Hlebowitsh, 1994). Rather, Giroux argues that the influence of capital in policy making and curriculum formation has become apparent in the everyday arrangement of teaching and learning practices in schooling today, to the extent that what was once termed the 'hidden curriculum' has now simply become the curriculum (Giroux, 1983).

The critical perspective on the hidden curriculum has been criticized on several counts. For example, Giroux (1983, P.288) has questioned whether all acts of student opposition should correctly be construed as resistance, and seeks to distinguish between rebelliousness and deviance. For instance, he points to the fact that '…resistance is usually described as a male working-class response to schooling and other forms of resistance – from females or from ethnic minority groups – are ignored' (2015, p.33). Expanding upon this point, Lynch (1989, p.4) has argued that early pioneers of the critical perspective such as Bowles and Gintis were too mechanistic in their critique of the relationship between schooling by treating students and teachers and schools as '…passive receivers of social norms, practices and values rather than active creators of meaning'. She also notes that many of the empirical studies about student resistance focus on class relations and ignore issues of gender and race (Lynch, 1989). Other accounts of the critical perspective have been criticised for their idealism, with Hargreaves (1982) claiming that notions of resistance only reflect the bias of leftist theorists who use it to justify their own cynicism. In view of the above shortcomings, later writings in the critical tradition have attempted to incorporate both critical and feminist narratives to expand the reach of its corpus and illustrate more clearly, how schools operate in the interests of the dominant class through the reproduction of existing class and power relations (Lynch, 1989; Apple,

2004). Despite these attempts, it is important to remain aware that this perspective '…continues to be subject to several theoretical and practical boundaries' (Anyon, 1981).

2.4.4 Curricular Perspectives: A Summary

Throughout the twentieth century, functionalist perspectives toward curriculum treated the norms within schooling as a natural sociological phenomenon that all people must tacitly conform to and accept. In this sense, proponents of the functionalist tradition viewed schools as vehicles through which students learn the norms, values and skills that are required to maintain social conditions by socialising children into adult working roles (Dickerson, 2007). As research into the sociology of education developed, functionalist views toward curriculum in schooling came under criticism from the liberal tradition which holds a more critical understanding of the role which human agency plays in society by emphasizing human agency (Seddon, 1983). In this way, the liberal narrative draws a clear line of distinction between with its functionalist counterpart, which attached far less importance to the role of the individual. Despite the challenges which the liberal perspective presented to the functionalist outlook, several shortcomings were also been identified in its treatment of the relationship between schooling and society from the neo-Marxist tradition. This position directly contrasts both the functionalist and liberal perspectives on schooling which view curriculum in schooling as a relatively benign part of socialization. By contrast, the leading argument behind the critical perspective is that schools primarily function as a market resource for governments whose primary objective is economic gain. Consequently, this outlook is primarily concerned with counter-acting dominant ideologies in schooling by developing resistant pedagogies amongst teachers and students. However, it is important to recognize that progressive governments have a chequered past when it comes to the implementation of their ideals in the form of policy and practice for social change. For example, the UK government under Heath in the 1970s infamously failed to reduce poverty and achieve educational targets for social mobility (Porter,

2006). Socialist education reform under Mitterand in France during the 1980s which controversially attempted to impose a secular ideology within schooling (Ambler, 1987). Similarly, the 'Socialist Experiment' in Sweden resulted in high levels of educational inequality under the Carlsson government of the early 1990s (Sanandaji, 2015). While in the U.S. the Race to the Top initiative introduced under the centre-left Obama administration represented a conservative attempt to address the issue of social inequality in schooling in the first decade of the new millennium (McGuinn, 2011). While, in the Irish context, the labour party notably reneged upon their pledge to abolish higher education fees upon entry to a coalition government during the Kenny era in the 2010s (Jeffers, 2012). Thus, it is apparent that a grounded view must be adopted in relation to the election of governing officials and their proposals for education, whatever their theoretical ideals may be.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to answer the first research question posed in chapter one by presenting an overview of the impact which ideology has had on curriculum as an educational concept in Western schooling in the twentieth century. It attempted to achieve this by outlining the different perspectives which are held about the function and purpose of curriculum as a concept from the perspective of three major ideological traditions. Drawing from this exploration, a number of inferences were made about dominant social theories and their relation to the role of curriculum within schooling. It was observed that, historically speaking, curriculum played an important role in instilling the conventions and norms of prevalent ideologies within educational contexts. Taking this premise, it was noted that curriculum design is not a neutral process, but instead, often reflects the dominant assumptions and values and assumptions of any given national context. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the term 'curriculum' has been interpreted in a multitude of ways, given the role which it performs in assisting different aims and outcomes in a variety of international contexts around the world.

These interpretations are typically connected to the prevailing attitudes and beliefs which relate to the context in which they function, whether they be religious; political or otherwise. Ultimately, however, it is important to remain aware that judgments about whether a curriculum is positive or negative depends upon the value stance of the person concerned (Seddon, 1983).

This chapter also attempted to unpack a number of different components which together form the concept of curriculum as a whole. It was observed that curriculum as a concept consists of both planned and unplanned objectives, which in turn, result in intentional and unintentional outcomes within student learning. This is to suggest that gaps may exist between the espoused aims of the planned curriculum, as indicated in official policy documents, and the direct ways in which this learning is experienced by students in school. These aspects of curriculum were termed 'hidden' and included the various assumptions and beliefs which underpin what is learned in schooling; how and why. It was noted that such aspects of curriculum are not always explicit, but rather, must be explored within the wider social context of their development in order for their meaning to become more apparent.

This chapter has attempted to build upon the last by establishing a theoretical framework to frame and guide the remainder of the thesis. The overview of ideology and curriculum provided in this chapter acts as a useful conceptual tool through which current recent paradigm shifts in Irish secondary schooling may be viewed. In relation to the first research question which this thesis hopes to answer, this chapter sought to highlight how ideology has been embedded within schooling from the perspective of three major traditions of the twentieth century. In doing so, it has attempted to create a useful frame through which structural an curricular changes in the Irish secondary context may later be understood. This historical outline will serve as a platform upon which changes in lower secondary reform may later be analysed from a critical perspective. This critique will seek to highlight various ideological features

underpinning the new Junior Cycle by showing how many of the changes introduced by this reform are explicitly linked to outcomes that are driven by labour market interests. Building upon this critique, it will be argued that a form of thinking is necessary through which students could learn to recognize and question the market linked influences which take place within their learning. Having established this contextual framework, the next chapter will look at the history of changes in Irish secondary education, with a particular focus on the development of lower second-level curriculum in schooling.

Chapter Three: Secondary Education in Ireland and the New Junior Cycle

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will seek to provide a historical synopsis of secondary schooling in Ireland since its origins in the mid-19th century. This purpose of this overview is to map the progression of second-level schooling within Irish education from its early beginnings, to its gradual evolution into a fiscal component which currently plays an important function at the centre of the Irish economy. A particular focus will be afforded to key curricular developments which have occurred in secondary education over the past three decades, following the introduction of the lower-second level curriculum. This overview will serve to contextualise the potential implications for student learning brought about by the current second-level curriculum, since it underwent recent reform.

The chapter will begin with two short points about Ireland's political history and its current approach to governance. These points of note play an important role in establishing the narrative through which the events described in the rest of the historical overview may be understood. By outlining key developments over the past thirty years, the main section also charts the impact of ideological assumptions on Irish education generally, and second level schooling, in particular, with a focus on curriculum development during this timeframe. The chapter then provides a short breakdown of how secondary schooling in Ireland is currently structured, as a means of framing changes that have been brought about by recent curricular reform. This chapter enables a clear entry to the research questions posed in the opening chapter by seeking to explore the extent to which Irish education, generally and secondary schooling, specifically, have shifted ideologically shifted over the past three decades. It builds on this question by examining the exact progression of movements under this shift. By exploring these

developments, a sequential path is followed on which the ideological impact of the new Junior Cycle [GCSE] reform can be explored.

It is historically significant to be note that Ireland was under British rule until the country was divided in two in the year 1921, with Northern Ireland remaining in the United Kingdom and the Irish Free State gaining independence (Chubb, 2014). Since gaining sovereignty, Irish governments have generally adhered to a set of principles derived from conservative liberalism or 'neo-liberalism' (Lynch, 2012). Over the past three decades, this form of liberalism has chiefly been characterised by support for minimum state intervention and market deregulation (Bell, 2014). For this reason, the ESRI (2018, p.13) labels Ireland as a 'liberal' country with '…the state acting only in order to support the market'. Thus, all references to governments from 1921 onwards, henceforth will assume a conservative form of political governance (Lynch, 2016). It is important to remain aware of this point because Ireland has never had a recognizably left-leaning government in its short history of sovereignty. As a result, Irish governments in recent decades have continued to adopt a conservative approach to most areas of social policy development, including healthcare, poverty and education (Murphy, 2014). As such, it is important to note that this conservative approach to governance, informed by liberal market principles also applies in relation to the way Irish governments have developed policy related outcomes for second-level schooling and curriculum design, as later sections will detail. The next section will begin with a historical overview of second-level schooling in Irish education.

3.2 Secondary Education: 1878-1989

State involvement in Irish secondary education dates back to nineteenth century, with the passing of the Intermediate Education Act [1878]. This act introduced a common curriculum and examination system for a secondary school system which was overseen by a Board of

Commissioners (Coolahan, 1981). Under British rule, the Irish State was limited in its capacity to make autonomous decisions relating to the provision and scope of national public services. For this reason, the first secondary schools in Ireland were run by a variety of religious bodies, who provided instruction to a small fee-paying minority of the population in a number of towns and cities. These schools were termed 'voluntary', meaning that they did not belong to the state and were run by religious groups on a need's basis (FCSSPA, 2014). In relation to learning, these schools held a strong academic bias, with a particular focus on classics, until the 1960s (Hyland, 1988). It was also at this early stage that the tradition of exam-dominated learning was established in Irish schooling, with the assessment of the original syllabi taking place through a summative format (Hyland, 1988).

Upon gaining independence, the Irish Free State gained control of education in early 1922. Shortly thereafter, the Department of Education was set up in 1924, at which point it replaced and assumed the functions of its predecessor, the Intermediate Education Board (Walsh, 2011). The aforementioned Intermediate Education Act [1878] was amended during the same year, resulting in the introduction of both the intermediate [later to become the 'Junior Certificate'] and Leaving Certificate examinations. Hyland (1988, pp. 32-33) notes that,

> to obtain a pass in the Intermediate Certificate examination, a pupil had to pass five subjects which had to include the following: (1) Irish or English; (2) a language other than that taken at (1); (3) Mathematics or (for girls only) arithmetic with any one of science, domestic science or music; (4) history and geography. From 1929 onwards pupils also had to pass Irish in order to pass the Intermediate Certificate.

These criteria offer an early insight into the expectations which were placed upon students in order to become active participants members within Irish society during its formative years of independence.

Despite its newfound liberty, the Irish government was not concerned with issues of educational ownership and was content to allow to schools to remain firmly in the hands of respective religious bodies who established them during the pre-independence era (Walsh, 2016). Soon thereafter, the new Government implemented a significant act (VEC, 1930) which

brought about the establishment of Vocational Education Committees (VECs) to oversee the technical provision of adult education and some secondary education, after the findings of a report on vocational education were published. This act marked the first attempt by the state to become directly involved in the provision of education in Ireland and was met with considerable opposition from the Catholic Church, which owned and managed both primary and post-primary schools during this period (Bray, 2020). Under this act, thirty-three VECs were established to administer education in most counties and county boroughs across the country. These committees existed from 1930 until 2013, at which point they were replaced by Education and Training Boards. Significantly, the aforementioned act (1930) introduced a platform of '…continuation education' which functioned to, '…continue and supplement education provided in elementary schools and to include general and practical training in preparation for employment in trades' (Hyland, p.33). These VECs were the first form of education in Ireland to include a state examination which was introduced in the form of the *Group Certificate* in 1947. In this way '…a dual system was established. Secondary schools were heavily academic; vocational schools emphasised practical studies' (Breathnach, 1993, p. 1). Although the state attempted to imprint its own stamp upon Irish education through these efforts, it is generally agreed that the VECs fared poorly in comparison to their second-level counterparts, due to low number of poor students who attended them (ESRI, 2013). Despite their negative reputation, VECs remained a significant form of educational provision in Ireland until the 1960s, when a number of important reforms were introduced which brought about significant change in the role and function of secondary education i.e. this system of organized learning remained in place until the introduction of the first state-established secondary schools in 1966 (O'Donoghue, 2016).

It is important at this point to look at the wider national context surrounding education in Ireland during this period. It is widely documented that the Irish economy had begun to decline

toward the midway point of the twentieth century, while other countries were beginning to recover during the post-war period (ESRI, 1999). Resulting from this context, the country had suffered from widespread poverty, mass unemployment and emigration. For this reason, Irish policymakers resolved to adopt and develop a free-market economy akin to those which were in place in other Western countries (ESRI, 2019). It was at this point in Irish history that traditional attitudes toward public services began to fade and were replaced by a new era of modernist thinking at a national level. This shift in national direction was spearheaded by the noted Irish politician and finance secretary T.K. Whitaker, who outlined a new vision for the Irish economy which entailed a plan to attract foreign direct investment using low tax incentives (Ryan, 2012). It is important to note here that the shifts in education and schooling described above took place at a significant juncture in Ireland's economic history. This strategy functioned as a precursor of things to come in the national domain, as it would provide the inspiration for the later economic regime of the 1980s which resulted in the country's Celtic Tiger period (Battel, 2003). This fiscal approach also formed a key part of the Irish State's recent plan for economic recovery after the 2008 financial crisis, which will form an important focal point later on in the thesis. Thus, Whitaker's plan to take Ireland in a new economic direction held a number of implications for Irish society at large and would prove to be an instrumental turning point for the role of schooling in Irish society.

As part of this vision described above, a strategy was formed to rescue the Irish economy by applying for membership of the Europe Economic Community in 1961 [EEC]. Despite initial rejection, Ireland's political focus from this point onward became heavily dependent on the attainment of this economic ambition. Ireland's drive to achieve this goal was evidenced through the establishment of a significant free trade agreement with Britain in 1966; the removal of other trade barriers and continued economic growth, thereby meeting the necessary requirements to become members of the EEC (later to become the EU), which it eventually

achieved in 1973 (EU, 2020). The national adoption of a modernist rationale across the public sphere resulted in a renewed discussion about the future purpose of second-level learning in Ireland. The overall impact of this cultural shift on education and schooling during this period is captured well in the words of Clancy (as cited in Farrell, 1998, p.10) who notes that:

> Modernisation discourses from the 1960s onwards resulted in the older emphasis on education as a means of personal development [being] challenged if not replaced by a new emphasis on shaping the educational system to meet the…demands of the labour market.

This shift in discourse was also apparent in a significant report promulgated the following decade titled, *Investment in Education,* which was commissioned by the Government in 1962 and published in 1966. This report resulted from Ireland's involvement at an OECD conference in Washington in 1961 on 'Economic growth and investment in education' and sought to introduce human capital theory to Irish education following a period of mass emigration in the 1950s (O'Dubhlaing, 1997). In this context, human capital theory may simply be understood as '…the stock of skills that the labour force possesses' (Goldin, 2014, p.1). The main impact of this new approach, as outlined in the 1966 report, was an attempt to increase national output by boosting participation in secondary education. Notably, the report '…highlighted the low rate of participation in second-level education in Ireland…more than one-third of 14 year olds had already left school; at 15 years of age fewer than 50 per cent were still in full-time education' (Looney, Irish Times, 2017). Linked to this point, it is worth noting that '…in 1960, just 5% of Irish students who completed secondary education went on to college (DES, 2011, p. 35)'. Within this report, a new approach to education began to emerge which attempted to improve Ireland's labour force by increasing manpower through training and skill development. This economic rationale behind this strategy is captured in the recommendations section of this document, which states that:

> As education is at once a cause and a consequence of economic growth, economic planning is incomplete without educational planning. Education, as well as having its own intrinsic values, is a necessary element in economic development (DOE, 1966, p.350).

Furthermore, this report called for greater efforts to be taken to reduce barriers to second-level entry for students and for existing curriculum structures to be replaced with skill-heavy learning and economic foresight in mind (Fitzgerald, 1965). Almost immediately following this report, a significant turning point occurred within Irish education when the Minister of Education, Donogh O'Malley announced the introduction of free secondary education and school transport in 1966. In his announcement speech, the Minister stated:

> The importance of providing better educated young people in our developing economy makes the 'free education scheme' all the more urgent. Already, a shortage of skilled workers is apparent in some sectors of our industry. Very soon, that shortage will be acute, and could endanger economic progress – unless we move quickly into the age of technology (O'Malley, 1966).

The market-led strategy described above, backed by a system of free secondary education marked an important turning point for the role that schooling would play in the Irish economy in subsequent decades (O'Sullivan, 1992). As Raftery and Hout (1993, p.44) note, it was at this point that '…Ireland's economic policy had become one that focused on encouraging industrial growth and attracting foreign investment'. To this end, government spending on education almost doubled to ensure the provision of secondary education to children of all social-economic backgrounds, in order to align with this policy (Raftery and Hout, 1993). The impact of this initiative is evidenced by the fact that the number of students who attended secondary education nearly doubled in the period between 1960 and 1970 (Walsh, 2016). These efforts to increase second-level participation resulted in the rapid growth of University matriculation. In the 1960s, Ireland implemented free secondary education and free student transportation to and from school. Shortly after the introduction of this reform at second-level, a system of regional technical colleges (RTCs) was set up as a pathway toward skill development for school children upon completion of their secondary education. These new institutions offered post-primary skill development courses which related to a number of growing business and tech industries. These attempts to reorganize the national education system were very successful in their objective of providing access to learning for people of all socio-economic backgrounds across

the country, resulting in the emergence of business-smart generation by the 1980s (Battel, 2003). The development of a modern work population formed an important part of the Whitaker's aforementioned plan to entice investment from multinational corporations in the Irish economy. This strategy came into full effect in 1969 when the country tasked a state sponsored body, the Industrial Development Authority (IDA), with the goal of attracting foreign direct investment into Ireland. This body subsequently identified ICT, digital communications and pharmaceuticals as examples of emergent industries which the country could market itself to in a bid to attract foreign stakeholders (Murphy, 2000). Shortly thereafter, the Irish Government under Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Lemass took its next significant step toward European membership at a national level by joining the European Monetary System (EMS) in 1978. This combination of market participation; education reform and the commercial efforts of the IDA brought about significant levels of economic mobility and marked the beginning of a new era of learning in Ireland. To put this shift in context, it can be observed that only 20% of students advanced to third-level education in Ireland by 1980. This rate more than doubled to 44% by 1998 and reached 55% in 2004 (O'Connell, McCoy & Clancy, 2006). Current participation rates now stand at 90%, more than four times that of the 1980 cohort, placing it amongst the highest in Europe (HEA, 2014).

Following these developments, the next significant change to occur in Irish secondary education was the creation of an advisory agency in the mid-1980s. The Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB), was established by the former Minister of Education, Gemma Hussey, with the primary function of providing, '…a suitable programme for all students, with a unified system for assessment and certification.' (Breathnach, 1993, p. 2). The establishment of this board in 1986 marked an important moment the development of an organized framework for assessment. This framework was officially announced as the Junior Certificate by the Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke in 1989. As the main focus of this thesis is on recent

developments within secondary education and the curriculum, it is appropriate to note here, the relative absence of importance afforded to subjects such as commerce and science in student learning up until this point. However, as one author notes '…over the next three decades, educating students for employment, especially in science, engineering and technology became the primary focus of government policy' (Lynch, 2012, p.93). Equally, it can be seen that up until the 1990s, levels of attendance at third-level were relatively low, when compared to the rest of Europe. However, as subsequent sections will detail, the level of importance afforded to both subject learning and matriculation are just two areas in second-level schooling which would change drastically.

3.2.1 Secondary Education: A Summary 1878-1989

Looking at the evolution of secondary education from its beginning up to this point in Irish history, a number of things are clear. First, it is evident that for a large part of its early existence, spanning roughly from the 1880s to the 1950s, secondary education in Ireland functioned largely as means through which students could enhance their personal development. This is to suggest that early secondary education aimed to develop the civic; moral and religious sensibilities of students through a system of learning which placed a strong focus on classical and scholastic subject knowledge. This approach to learning began to shift in the 1960s when an international shift toward market driven learning changed the overall function and purpose of Irish secondary education. These developments, were largely shaped by shifts in the international labour market, resulting in the dominant assumption that the fundamental purpose of public learning is to prepare students for the labour workforce. This shift in rationale was solidified by the introduction of free secondary education which represented a landmark moment in Irish schooling and set in motion a new era of education in Ireland. From this point forward, Irish secondary education would gradually become more closely intertwined with the aims and interests of the national economy. These national interests, in turn, were shaped and

continue to be informed by Ireland's membership status as part of the EU and its direct participation in the global economy. This relationship has gradually intensified over the past thirty years, stemming largely from economic developments which have continued to have a significant impact on curriculum within Western schooling. The next section will provide a structural overview of secondary education in Ireland today.

3.3. Secondary Education: A Structural Overview

The current post-primary sector in Ireland is comprised of three different types of school. These types of school are:

- Voluntary secondary schools, which are privately owned and run, under the sponsorship of a religious body; governors or individuals. In the past, voluntary secondary schools held a direct academic focus but increasingly, they offer a variety of academic, practical and vocational subject choices.

- Community schools and comprehensive schools, are typically denominational (e.g. Roman Catholic or Protestant). These schools were formed in the 1960s in order to provide a broad curriculum for all the youth in a local area. These schools overseen by boards of management which represent local interests and offer a wide range of subject options.

- Vocational schools and community colleges [formerly known as 'VECs'] which are owned by the local Education and Training Board [ETB] and are non-denominational. ETBs first came into existence in 2013 when they replaced the existing system of VECs, which had been in place since 1930. The boards who govern these schools are formed from sub-committees of the local ETB. Originally, these schools were functioned to deliver a technical education which focused on developing practical skills. Today, these schools generally provide a wide range of both academic and practical subjects (Citizens Information, 2019).

3.3.1 Secondary Education: A Structural Overview (1989-Present)

Contemporary post-primary schooling in Ireland is structured in a broadly similar way to other European countries. For example, the curriculum for all three types of post-primary school is approved by the Department of Education, which is guided by an advisory body, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA: the statutory agency established to determine curricula and assessment in the context of a national curriculum]. In an Irish context, the term 'curriculum' refers to '…the content, structure and processes of teaching and learning, which the school provides in accordance with its educational objectives and value' [DES, 1995, p.19]. Post-primary schooling in Ireland typically takes six years to complete and is divided into two cycles. The first three years of schooling are referred to as the 'Junior Cycle' [the Irish equivalent to GCSE], while the final two years are termed 'Senior Cycle' [the Irish equivalent to A-Levels]. Most post-primary schools also offer students the option to undertake an additional year of learning, which is referred to as the Transition Year Programme (TYP). This year is so-called as it takes place directly after students complete the initial three-year cycle and functions as a year of transition into the Senior Cycle programme.

All individual subjects on the post-primary curriculum are designed to contribute to the overall aims of Junior or Senior Cycle. This curriculum includes syllabi which detail the lists of content to be covered within each subject and directives on how these subjects are to be assessed. Matriculation in Ireland is based on an accumulative points system which is assigned by the Central Applications Office (CAO) (Leahy, 2014). In order to attain the requisite number of points for a third-level course, Senior Cycle students must undertake a minimum of six subjects, each carrying a maximum of one hundred points, which are grade contingent (SCoTENS, 2004). The CAO system sets a maximum benchmark of six hundred points, based on the strongest grade results of students' best six subjects (ESRI, 2019). Extra points can be

gained if students elect to take an additional subject or to study mathematics at a higher level [which will be explained later in the chapter] (SERG, 2016).

At the current time of writing, secondary schooling curriculum design in Ireland is undergoing reform. In 2011, the NCCA introduced a new Junior Cycle curriculum with the intended goal of '…incorporating a modernised curriculum across all subjects and a balanced range of assessment modes that will help to deliver a learner experience appropriate to the needs of the 21st century' [DES, 2015, p.2]. It is stated that this curricular reform will enable learners to use and analyse information '…in new and creative ways, to investigate issues, to explore, to think for themselves, to be creative in solving problems and to apply their learning to new challenges and situations' [DES, p.3]. This reform is currently near the point of completion, with a view to full implementation across all Irish secondary schools by the end of 2021. Concurrently, a revised Senior Cycle curriculum is also under development which will come into effect in the ensuing years [NCCA, 2017]. Similar to the new Junior Cycle reform, the new Senior Cycle (the established route through which post-primary students gain direct entry to third level education) will entail both new subjects and new modes of assessment, which are as yet undetermined (Irish Times, 2018). This background is presented simply to provide context to the issues that will follow in subsequent sections.

Furthermore, before examining the changes to learning which were brought about by the introduction of the Junior Certificate and its various reforms to date, further contextual information is required in order to understand the significance of these curricular shifts in relation to this thesis. Consequently, it is deemed appropriate to provide a detailed overview of key ideological developments within Irish education over the past thirty years and the implications which these changes have held for the structure of learning at second-level. This overview will be divided into three separate periods dating back to the beginning of the 1990s. This time frame has been chosen due to a series of important economic changes that took place

in Ireland over the duration of this period and will explore their impact upon post-primary schooling. This exploration will serve a neat segue through which the rationale and changes underpinning the history of the Junior Certificate [now Junior Cycle] can be examined at the end of the chapter. The next section will look at the first of three key periods of changes for Irish secondary schooling.

3.3.1 Secondary Education: 1992-2000

At the beginning of the 1990s, the Republic of Ireland was headed by a conservative Fianna Fáil government under the leadership of Taoiseach Charlie Haughey. During this period, the country underwent a significant economic transition which signalled an important turning point in the national context. Among the many changes which arose from this fiscal shift was a complete reform of education which sought to shift the focus of learning at all levels of instruction in Ireland. This vision for reform was outlined in a series of key policy documents on education, which in turn held several implications for learning in schooling, as this section will outline.

Following an international trend, the Irish Government under Taoiseach Haughey adopted a system of neo-liberal economics in the 1990s, thereby marking its transformation from a state shaped by religious values to a state ruled by market ideology (O'Sullivan, 2006). Neo-liberalism in this context, can be understood as the adoption of free-market principles, in particular, liberal enterprise and active attempts to attract foreign investment through the privatization of public services (O'Riain, 2004). A brief synopsis of the impact which this shift in economic governance has caused is detailed in the following statistical breakdown (as cited in O'Callaghan et al, 2015, p.34):

> From the early 1990s, the Irish government increasingly embraced free market ideologies, putting in place a corporate tax rate of 12.5% and aggressively courting foreign direct investment (FDI) in the form of (primarily) US multinationals (O'Hearn, 1998; O'Riain, 2004). In 1985, Ireland had the third worst level of poverty in the EU. In 1994–2004, the average income in Ireland reached one of the highest of

any developed nation, while unemployment fell to 4% between 2000 and 2004 (Kirby & Jacobson, 2006). Meanwhile long-standing emigration trends were reversed, and the population grew by 30% (1.065 million people) between 1991 and 2011 (CSO, 2012a).

In addition to the changes in public life noted above, various governments also began to reform the principles underpinning the Irish education system to more closely resemble this new economic strategy. For example, one OECD report from this period (1991, p.25) notes that '…the notion of investment in education for growth and development took firm root' in the Republic of Ireland at this stage. The renewed objectives that were envisioned for Irish education were set out in the form of two key policy documents which were published in the space of a three-year period. One of the leading advocates of this reform was the former Minister for Education, Seamus Brennan, who played a formative role in the development of the first policy document in this reform [Green Paper on Education, 1992]. In the foreword to this paper, Brennan [1992, p.3] stated that part of the rationale behind the proposed educational reform was to '…introduce a spirit of enterprise in our young people and to prepare them for a new world'. In keeping with this commercial vision, the document further outlined the view that '…the unspoken assumption of the Green Paper, the real aim…is to unlock the gates to various forms of employment and economic development' (1992, p.19). It is important to note here that the Green Paper was explicit in its view that:

> Education is not a commodity. It does not improve or become more efficient in response to the market forces of supply and demand. Applying the laws of the market place to education dilutes rather than distils it [p.13].

Despite warning against market influence, the vision set out within the Green Paper demonstrated a clear bias towards commercial outcomes by placing an emphasis on individualism in student learning, at the expense of artistic and civic development (Clancy, 1997).

The Irish Government experienced a change in leadership in 1994, during which it continued to be led by Fianna Fáil party under the leadership of Taoiseach John Bruton. Following this

change, the Green Paper was reviewed and decisions about this pre-legislative draft were finalized in a second policy document. This revised document, titled the *White Paper on Education* set out the early stages of enterprise-driven in education by seeking to raise levels of culpability through an increased focus on measurement in assessment (Lynch, 2012). This publication marked an important turning point in Irish education by introducing a discernible shift from the rhetoric of education as a public good to that of market commodity. For example, it outlined the clear position that '…investment in education is a crucial concern of the State to enhance Ireland's capacity to compete effectively in a rapidly changing international environment' (Station House, 1995, p.5). A discernible shift in the language used to describe learning at second-level can also be attributed to this policy document, which sought to forge an explicit link between schooling and national economic interests. As one author notes, it was from this point that the Irish State began to tactically replace the language of students and learners with that of 'customers and clients' (Gleeson and O'Donnabháin, 2009, p.30). This legislation was quickly re-enforced through a series of further policy initiatives which laid out a vision for schooling that was strongly underpinned by the language of commerce (Walsh, 2016). These changes at second-level were intensified in the late 1990s under the new Fianna Fáil leadership of Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, which placed an emphasis on the cultivation of technology in schooling. This strategy was outlined in the publication of a four-year plan which sought to merge the country's economic needs with outcomes in schooling, through a shift toward technological and skills-based learning. In the preface to this document, the Minister for Education announced that '…this Information and Communications Technology (ICT) initiative will place our pupils and teachers at the cutting edge of international innovation and development in education and help to secure important skills necessary to our future economic wellbeing' [Schools IT 2000: Report, 1997, p.1]. The primary objective of this ICT strategy was to '…bring about a national partnership involving schools, parents, local communities,

third-level institutions together with public and private sector organisations to meet the project's ambitious aims' [1997, p.2]. The Irish State's commitment to this strategy was indicated through a £40 million investment toward the achievement of three targets in schooling, namely: further policy and research; teacher training and equipping every school in the country with ICT classroom resources (INTO, 2017). These changes in schooling were further re-enforced by publication of a landmark piece of educational legislation, in the form of the *Education Act* [1998]. This act filled an important legislative void in Irish education by creating a national framework in which policies and regulations relating to schooling were clearly defined for the first time (Mooney-Simmey, 2012). This legislation also paved the way for a wave of further policy measures that sought to regulate all aspects of teaching and learning in schooling more stringently (Ibid, 2012). In doing so, it consolidated a series of initiatives that sought to introduce corporatist approaches to schooling before the end of the twentieth century.

Looking at the educational policy documents during the 1990s, a clear pattern begins to emerge which indicates that consecutive governments, under conservative leadership, attempted to merge outcomes in schooling with economic ambitions. As one author observed prior to this millennium, '…schooling has moved away from a pupil-based ethos within the community to a customer linked system. The role of education is to create that which is alluring to the potential market' (McCann, 1999, p.35). The next section will explore how the market driven educational policies continued to impact upon schooling in the first decade of the millennium. In particular, it will focus on how this evolving view of schooling as an extension of the Irish economy made it increasingly prone to changes which take place in the wider international markets.

3.3.2 Secondary Education: 2000-2008

Having adopted an economic system governed by free market principles in the early 1990s (Lynch, 2012), Ireland experienced an economic boom in the first decade of the millennium, which has been characterized as 'The Celtic Tiger' (Cawley, 2005). The economic success experienced during this period led to widespread prosperity across the country, marked by rapid growth in the areas of property development and construction (Murphy, 2013). During this period, the Irish government under the same leadership continued to intensify the market driven approach to learning in schooling which it had begun prior to the millennium. It is with this context in mind that this section will explore the growing relationship between economy and schooling during this period.

While a body of literature exists (Cooney, 2008; Kitchin, O'Callaghan, Boyle, Gleeson & Keaveney, 2012; Power, O'Flynn, Courtois & Kennedy, 2013) which explores the impact of neo-liberalism in Irish higher education during in the Celtic Tiger era, there has been limited research to investigate the impact of market-led changes on the post-primary sector during this period (Lynch, 2006). As indicated in the previous section, the primary initiative which the Irish State sought to foster in schooling at the end of the twentieth century was economic growth, and technological development through ICT in schooling. This vision for technological expansion in schooling was further strengthened in the first educational policy document of the new millennium. Building on previous policy initiatives, this policy (2000, p.59) placed a renewed focus on the development of ICT, citing the importance of '…technologies to the growth in our economy' as justification for its place amongst other principle outcomes of schooling. In effect, secondary schooling became a conduit through which the Irish State could support its economic imperatives by placing an emphasis on technological-driven learning (Morley, 2001). Concurrent with this shift toward technology-based schooling, the Irish government under Taoiseach Ahern also introduced a series of new measures to bring about a

stronger degree of regulation and efficiency in schooling during this period. These changes in schooling coincided with a nationwide benchmarking body process that was established by the Irish State in the year 2000 to compare the value of public service jobs with similar professions in the private sector (Halton, 2003). As with similar reforms that had taken place in the UK, this review operated from the basis that education comprised part of the service industry and could be efficiently organized to deliver its product in the same way as other public provisions (Morley and Rassool, 2000). This attempt to run public services in accordance with the principles of private industry marked a clear example of the Irish State's adherence to neo-liberal ideology during this period (Collins, 2007). As part of this benchmarking process, the Irish State took a number of steps to re-structure its schooling at second-level in line with other public service reforms. To this end, the Department of Education [DES] hired the secretary general of the Department of Finance, Sean Cromien, to conduct an in-depth review of its operational layout. The subsequent publication, [known as 'The Cromien Report'] proposed that the DES should concentrate on overseeing the development and implementation of educational policies, while outsourcing its other duties:

> Policy will remain the responsibility of the Department. To ensure this, an appropriate framework should be established within which the outside body would be required to operate, coupled with a system of regular reporting to the Department. (DES, 2000, p.5)

Abiding by the recommendations made in this report, the '…Department's role would evolve to one of policy development, monitoring and evaluation' (DES, 2000, p. 4). As one author observed, this report contained '…a neo-liberal rationale for the splitting up of the Ministry and the movement of various functions upwards, sideways and downwards' (Mooney-Simmey, 2014, p.500). This re-structuring enabled the DES to assume a managerial position by shifting a large portion of its liability to other stakeholders within schooling such as principals and teachers (Morley & Rassool, 2000).

Almost immediately following this report, a series of measures were put in place that sought to introduce greater degree of accountability to teaching as a profession. The most notable example of this change was The Teaching Council Act, 2001 which represented a landmark step in the regulation of teaching as a profession through the establishment of a standards body for Irish teachers. This body describes its own role as '…a handmaiden of the Ministry' and defines the purpose of teaching as '…knowledge, skills and competence for effective professional practice' (Teaching Council Act, 2001, Section 38). The primary function of the Teaching Council is to monitor and review the training and education requirements necessary for a person to practice teaching, on an intermittent basis (INTO, 2010). In effect, the establishment of this body created a structured system of regulations through which the Irish State could gain control over schooling by introducing standards and directives to govern teaching as an occupation (Mooney-Simmie, 2014). In doing so, the Irish State under conservative leadership successfully re-positioned itself at the top of the hierarchy in schooling, while placing teachers in a more functionary role with the primary task of implementing policy initiatives. As one background report to the OECD noted [2003, p.10] '…Ireland is in the fortunate position in undertaking a policy overview of its teaching profession while not having to react to pressing shortages or weaknesses in the quality of its teaching force.' As part of this educational re-structuring, the Irish State introduced a national policy of whole school evaluation [WSE] in 2004 in order to establish '…a model of quality assurance that emphasises school development planning through internal school review and self-evaluation' (DES, 2003, p. 8). This self-governing process is enforced through an external system of evaluation carried out by an inspectorate which functions to ensure that post-primary schools operate in accordance with national standards (McNamara, 2012). Many of the changes implemented above can be summarized in the words of Lynch (2012, p.89), who argues that this shift toward the business-like regulations in schooling can be understood in the context of 'managerialism'

which she defines as a '…management strategy for neo-liberalism'. Resulting from Ireland's economic growth during the Celtic Tiger period, schooling became further incorporated as an economic component within the market-driven engine of the Irish economy. This economically motivated approach to schooling can be understood within the overall context of a benchmarking process initiated by the Irish State to incorporate the structures and values of the private sector within public services. As one author aptly put it, schooling during this period was underpinned by '…business values whereby students and their parents are defined as consumers' (Dunne, 2002, p.86). This shift in the focus of schooling was primarily evidenced through the series of changes brought about by the conservative Irish Government to create quality assurance in schooling in order to reinforce a second-level system based upon market driven outcomes. The next section will explore how an economic downturn brought about a key shift in Irish educational policy development over the past decade. It will look at how the Irish State under new leadership has targeted schooling as a means toward economic recovery by introducing a number of measures to align national education with market interests. In particular, the section will highlight the efforts by this government to prioritise certain forms of subject learning within education, which reflects a direct attempt to instil human capital initiatives within public learning. This exploration will begin with an overview of how market driven policies have impacted upon higher education. By first exploring changes at third-level in this way, a contextual basis will be formed, through which changes at second-level may be understood in the sections which follow.

3.3.3 Irish Higher Education: 2008-2019

Following a sustained period of economic growth during the Celtic Tiger period, Ireland was among a number of countries which fell into recession following a global financial crisis (O'Leary, 2007). This crash impacted widely upon all sectors across the country, resulting in widespread financial loss and unemployment. During this period of economic difficulty,

Ireland continued under the conservative leadership of a Fianna Fáil government, led by Taoiseach Brian Cowan. It is within this global and national economic context that changes in Irish higher education will be explored.

The Government of Ireland entered into a period of economic austerity following an international monetary crash in 2008. This global crisis played a significant role in the simultaneous collapse of both Ireland's property and banking sectors, leading to loss of economic sovereignty and entry into a bail-out agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Jacobson et al, 2006). As a result of this financial breakdown, Western governments intensified their market driven approach to higher education by adopting a series of policy initiatives designed to cultivate enterprise and innovation driven learning (Mooney-Simmie, 2014). Responding to this period of economic instability, the Irish Government also continued to implement economic policies that were characterized by a competitive market strategy. As Printer (2020, p.2) notes, the Irish government was '…bound by their financial aid package to make sweeping cuts across all areas of public spending, including education, where key policy decisions were now being directed by powerful external forces'. This strategy was outlined in two key policy documents published in the immediate aftermath of the economic crash (Forfás 2009; SFI, 2009) both of which outlined a plan for national economic recovery through the development of key skills and competition in the public sector. These policies had a direct influence upon national learning initiatives as the government placed an increased focus on higher education as a route toward economic re-stability (Holborrow, 2013). Consequently, it was at this point that higher education in Ireland became more directly entwined with the national economy and fiscal interests at a national level (Conway, 2013).

Following a national election in 2011, a new government emerged under the leadership of Ireland's other conservative party, Fine Gael, led by Taoiseach Enda Kenny. Despite this change in national leadership, Ireland's new government continued to employ the same

educational strategy as its predecessor in seeking to attain economic recovery. The blueprint

for this strategy was outlined in a policy document titled the *National Strategy for Higher*

Education to 2030 (known as the 'Hunt Report). Upon publication, this report called for the

marketable potential of higher education to be realized through by strengthening its role within

the Irish economy. The recommendations outlined in the Hunt Report resulted in a complete

reform of the Irish Higher Education system in 2012. This reform set out a clear four-step

approach with the direct goal of strengthening the relationship between higher education and

national economic growth. Namely, it set out to:

1. Strengthen the university system.
2. Develop the Institute of Technology sector.
3. Form regional clusters between universities, institutes of technology and future technological universities.
4. Increase sustainability and capacity in the higher education system (HEA, 2012).

These measures demonstrate a clear attempt on the part of the Government to establish a merger

between higher education and the country's economic ambitions. To achieve this vision, the

Government set out new targets for higher education, which placed a focus on filling skill

shortages in particular areas of economic demand. In order to realise this ambition, the Irish

State highlighted the role of human capital in its strategy for fiscal recovery, by increasing the

number of students choosing to pursue careers related to economic demand (DES, 2014). This

policy approach was signalled by the former minister for education on higher education reform,

in which he stated that,

> If we are to survive in the current turbulent European and global environment we need to build on our strengths. And our primary strength lies in our people. The quality of what economists call our human capital is a significant attraction for investors and entrepreneurs (Quinn, 2012).

The excerpt both confirms the economic rationale which underpinned the Irish State's vision

for the future of Irish education and reflects its intention to achieve this goal by ensuring that

it would be able to match growing demand on the global jobs market for certain key areas of

learning. In particular, a clear emphasis was attached to ICT skill development within higher

education as a means towards increasing the number of graduates choosing to enter STEM related professions (DES, 2014). This strategy is evidenced by the fact that in 2011 alone, the Irish State provided over €900 million in research funding higher education research funding, '…mainly in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) areas, as well as encouraging diffusion of knowledge through technology transfer' towards the development of a 'knowledge economy' (L&RS, 2014, P.8). A similar approach to education was outlined in the Irish State's Action Plan for ICT Skills (2014-2018), which stated that:

> There are few drivers which will be more important to global job creation in the coming years than the development of ICT skills…this Action Plan is intended to meet the Government's ambition [that] Ireland will become the most attractive location in the world for ICT Skills availability (Quinn, 2014, P.3).

The excerpts demonstrate the Irish State's long-term ambition to ensure that its education system would be able to match the growing demand on the global jobs market for areas of learning related to the technological business industry. As later sections will show, this reform would have significant implications for secondary education, due to the trickle-down pressure resulting from this newfound demand to fill university course places.

Following a period of re-growth between 2013-2017, the Irish economy largely recovered from its financial collapse, evidenced by the fact that the national rate of unemployment fell by more than 50% between 2012 and 2018 (AIB Report, 2018). This recovery was directly boosted by the role which higher education played in the economic recovery process since the recession, with one report noting:

> Irish higher education system has delivered what has asked of it and more, both in meeting the demand for increased student places and in meeting the increased skills needs of a recovering economy (Higher Education System Performance Report, 2017, p.6).

This passage demonstrates the overall effectiveness of the role which higher education played in the Government's strategy toward economic re-growth, in a very a short period of time. This financial recovery marked another turning point in the relationship between higher education and the Irish economy, as the Irish State sought to capitalize on the success which this approach

had yielded. Consequently, having ended its bail-out agreement in 2013, the Irish State has since attempted to cultivate economic prosperity by building further upon its strategy for human capital within higher education (Harkin and Hazlekorn, 2014). In an effort to realize this approach, then Government implemented a three-year strategy to bring about an increase in STEM subjects. At the launch of this strategy, the minister for education in situ said:

> The ability to attract new jobs, and having our people fill those jobs, is dependent on having a well-educated, well-skilled and adaptable work force. This National Skills Strategy aims to provide an education and training system that is flexible enough to respond to a rapidly changing environment (Bruton, 2014)

This excerpt neatly captures the commercial vision projected for the future of Irish education, as the Irish State sought to solidify its position as a pecuniary component within its broader economic ambitions. This approach to higher education received further support in a national strategy for research and development, which emphasized the availability of STEM graduates as a key factor in drawing foreign investment (DES, 2015). This strategy was shaped by a review published by the National Skills Bulletin (2012-2015), which emphasized that '…there are skills shortages for Professionals and Associate Professionals across sectors in areas of ICT, Science and Engineering' in supply and demand trends for skills in the economy (INSS, 2016, p.23). In order to fill these skill gaps, the report outlined the following objectives for education:

1. Education and training providers will place a stronger focus on providing skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners, society and the economy.
2. Employers will participate actively in the development of skills and make effective use of skills in their organisations to improve productivity and competitiveness.
3. The quality of teaching and learning at all stages of education will be continually enhanced and evaluated.
4. People across Ireland will engage more in lifelong learning.
5. There will be a specific focus on active inclusion to support participation in education and training and the labour market.
6. We will support an increase in the supply of skills to the labour market (2016, p.11).

The objectives set out by this review sought to build upon a number of education policy initiatives that had already been introduced by the Irish State under Taoiseach Kenny which aimed to generate further uptake in these areas of learning. As such, this review represented a continuation and intensification of strategies for higher education which the Irish State had

already begun to implement in the aftermath of the 2008 recession i.e. to create an educational pipeline in which students formed the requisite supply to meet national economic demand. Under the recent leadership of Fianna Gael, the Irish State has placed STEM at the centre of its two most recent national Actions Plans for Education (2017, 2018) through which it aspires to make '…the Irish Education and Training System the best in Europe over the next decade' (DES, 2018, p.5). In support of this strategy, Taoiseach Varadkar announced a three pillared human capital initiative worth €300 million in funding for higher education to drive innovation at third-level over a five-year period (DES, 2018). The primary objective of this human capital initiative is to fund additional capacity within third-level education and to use that investment to meet priority skill needs for the future (DES, 2019). Significantly, as part of this initiative, it was announced that industry employers would have a greater role in determining how this funding was spent, with much of it '…likely to go towards competitive funding calls to meet skills gaps' (O'Brien, Irish Times, 2018). A report commissioned by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) in 2019 estimated that Irish universities yielded an annual return of €8.9 billion over a three-year period (2017-2019). The findings in this report observed that '…universities play a central role in the economic, social and cultural life of the nation. They feed the talent pipeline for the growing knowledge economy' (IUA, 2019, P.4). Commenting on the findings of this report, the director general of the UAI, stated that '…[This study] shows that more State investment in university education isn't just the right thing to do; it's the profitable thing to do' (Miley, 2019, UCD Online). In 2020, the Irish State announced the creation of 3000 new places for undergraduate courses, under pillar two of the human capital initiative, described above. These places were allocated with a primary focus afforded to the '…high priority skill areas of science, engineering, ICT and construction (Dermody, Irish Examiner, 2020).

This transition toward key areas of teaching and learning in higher education forms part of a wider international trend in education which places learning in service of multi-national capital or what has been referred to as the 'Global Economy' [Coles, 2018]. Within this trend, Mercille and Murphy (2015, p.1) described Ireland in microcosm as a '…proto-typical neoliberal state whose …education sector has been shaped by forces originating from the European Union, global institutions, as well as from the interests of Irish political and economic elites'. Stemming from the shift toward market-led outcomes in higher education outlined above, the next section will look at the effect which this strategy has had upon second-level learning over the past decade. To this end, the section will look at trickle-down effect which the market driven demand for STEM graduates in higher education has had upon secondary education in Ireland. In particular, it will look at the how the role of post-primary learning has been gradually re-aligned to merge with the Irish State's broader economic ambitions for higher education.

3.3.4 Secondary Education: 2008-2020

The previous section charted how the economic collapse in 2008 resulted in a succession of changes in Irish higher education. Foremost among these changes were a series of efforts by the Government under both Taoiseachs Kenny and Varadkar to re-align the aims of higher education with market objectives. As previously established, these changes were primarily introduced in order to make Ireland an attractive site for investment through the development of skilled graduates in key areas of learning. Driven by economic motives, the Irish State placed a strong focus upon the output of STEM learning in third-level education. Consequently, this section will outline how many of the key changes which occurred in secondary education during this period mirrored the Irish State's ambitions for higher education.

As noted, the government under the leadership of successive conservative parties attempted to strengthen the relationship between higher education and the Irish economy as a cost-effective

route toward financial recovery following the crash of 2008. Following this approach to learning at third-level, post-primary schooling also became more visibly market driven in its policy approach during this period (Mooney-Simmie, 2012). This shift has been indicated through a series of state-led initiatives designed to improve rates of participation at third-level. For example, following the recession, the Irish State placed a strategic focus on increasing the number of students who completed their secondary education. As a result, nearly 70% of students who finished post-primary schooling in 2010 went on to third-level education, putting Ireland in the top tier of attendance within Europe (Holborow, 2012). Building upon this strategy, the Irish State then sought to implement a strong market-led approach to secondary learning by placing an emphasis upon the development of key skills and learning in schooling. This plan was outlined in two government reports (BISE, 2008; Next Leap, Ryan, 2009), both of which targeted post-primary education as a means towards economic growth through the development of STEM learning. Similar pressure to develop innovation in schooling also emerged from both the National Competiveness Council (NCC, 2009) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2011). This emphasis upon STEM learning followed similar reform initiatives to those which took place in the UK such as the *STEM Review* (2009) and *Success Through STEM* (2011). This shift toward enterprise driven learning in schooling resulted in the language of commerce being used to describe second-level students. As one policy document put it:

> the people who enter higher education in the coming decades are the job creators, policy-makers, social innovators and business leaders of the future…and the productive engine of a vibrant and prosperous economy (DES, 2011, p.53).

The commercial rhetoric evident in this passage is characteristic of the paradigm shift which took place in learning during this period i.e. the instrumentalization of students as human capital for economic purposes. In aid of this ambition, the Irish State placed a clear focus upon

the development of mathematics within schooling, viewing it as a key driver in Ireland's economic development:

> Ireland's future economic growth and competitiveness will increasingly depend on the extent to which it can support high value knowledge-based industries. Mathematics is essential for disciplines such as science, technology, engineering and finance…in a globalised competitive economy it is important that Ireland moves beyond being 'average' at mathematics towards the promotion of advanced levels of skills, creativity and innovation. (DES 2010, p. 4).

This market-led rationale envisioned in this excerpt resulted in a targeted Government effort to improve mathematical performance in post-primary schools on a national level. This ambition led to the development of a policy strategy on numeracy which aimed to attract investment by improving national standards in mathematics during a period of economic turbulence (DES, 2011). One of the main ways the Irish State has attempted to realise this goal is by encouraging students to undertake higher level mathematics at Leaving Certificate level. To achieve this, the Irish State under Taoiseach Kenny introduced a bonus points initiative for students who successfully pass the exam at this level. As one University noted '…bonus points were brought in to maximise the number of students opting for higher-level maths and with the long-term goal of improving national competitiveness, skills needs and competencies underpinning innovation' (DCU, 2018). The effect of this initiative is evidenced by the fact that the rate of participation for higher level mathematics has more than doubled since its introduction in 2012 (DCU, 2018). Commenting upon this upsurge in demand, the NCCA (2016, P.19) stated that '…these are positive developments…given the underpinning role that Mathematics plays across STEM disciplines'. It has also been noted that this bonus points incentive at Senior Cycle has also caused an increase in the number of students choosing to study the higher-level option at Junior Cycle (SERG, 2016).

In order to meet the demand for market driven learning, the Irish State under Taoiseach Varadkar outlined its intention to increase the number of students taking studying STEM subjects for the Leaving Cert (A Level equivalent) by 20 per cent. Included within this aim is

a plan to increase the number of female students taking STEM subjects at Senior Cycle by 40 per cent within the next decade (Irish Times, 2017). To realise this goal, the government launched two new initiatives aimed at increasing the number of girls choosing to study STEM for their Leaving Certificate and beyond. Commenting on this launch, the president of Dublin City University stated that the purpose of these initiatives '…is to enhance the 'Stem pipeline' in Ireland' (MacCraith, Irish Times, 2018). To support this economic strategy, the Irish State implemented a widespread STEM recruitment drive aimed at attracting graduate students to enter the teaching profession in order to fill a shortage of qualified teachers in STEM subject areas (Irish Times, 2017). This plan for STEM recruitment received further backing from Ireland's leading trade union for secondary teachers, the Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI) with its general secretary openly stating that '…STEM is critical to future economic growth and to opening up job opportunities for thousands of young people'. Thus, following the policy changes at third-level described earlier, it is evident that Irish secondary education has been placed under economic pressure to increase levels of matriculation in specific fields. The extent to which this state-led strategy has affected subject choice in Irish schooling will be later detailed via a statistical breakdown of CAO applications over a ten-year period.

3.4 Brief History of the Junior Cycle in Ireland

This section will offer an overview of the Junior Cycle in Irish second level schooling. The section will attempt to map important stages within the development of the second level curriculum, known as the Junior Cycle, since its introduction in 1989. The content covered will focus on four stages of development of Junior Cycle education in Ireland: The Intermediate Certificate; the Junior Certificate; The State Examinations Commission and the and the more recently revised New Junior Cycle. Specific subject content details for each of the above listed

curricular shifts will not be presented for two reasons. First, this thesis is not concerned with exact course components within curricula, as much as with the structures and processes which shape those subjects; second, the data gathered for this thesis does not focus on specific courses or subjects within the curriculum, but rather, students' overall experiences and perceptions of learning under the new curriculum. Further details of each of the four stages within curricular development listed above can be found in the reference materials cited within the text.

3.4.1 The Intermediate Certificate

Prior to the introduction of the Junior Certificate in 1989, a different cycle of assessment existed in second-level schooling known as 'The Intermediate Certificate'. This cycle, colloquially known as the 'Inter-Cert', was designed for the same age group of students (15-16 years) and functioned, '…to provide a well-balanced, general education suitable for pupils who leave full-time education at about 16 years of age or, alternatively, who wish to enter on more advanced courses of study' (DES, 2004). The course of study succeeding this cycle, as it remains today, was already known as the Leaving Certificate. The aims and purposes of the Leaving Certificate were outlined as, '…to prepare pupils for immediate entry into open society or for proceeding to further education.' (Looney, 1987). The above quotations offer an early insight into the rationale behind the matriculation process within the Irish school system. With this stated purpose in mind, this section will seek to examine how this rationale progressed in the next phase of development.

3.4.2 CDU and CEB

The Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), '…was established in 1972 to develop new teaching and learning programmes. These programmes were intended for 12-15 year old students, and, as such, formed a natural link with the primary school curriculum. The early work of the Unit concentrated on the areas of science, humanities (English, History, Geography

and Civics) and outdoor activities.' (CDU, 1981, 5). The work of the CDU highlighted progressive approaches to practitioner-based educational research, and sought a more inclusive and student-centred second-level syllabus effort. This push toward reform resulted in a wave of significant changes within Irish education at all levels of learning, beginning in the mid-1980s. Perhaps the most notable change during this period came was the establishment of the Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB), which published several important documents relating to national curricula and syllabi, including secondary education (1984). Included in this policy document was a section titled, 'Science & the New Technologies', which stated that the newly established Board,

> recognises the significance of the basic sciences and the new technologies in the lives of all our people today, and the central role they have to play in the economic and social development of the country. The Board would wish to have these views reflected in the school experience of young people at first and second levels. It intends to formulate a detailed policy on this matter (CEB, 1984, 10-11).

This statement would prove to be significant, as the proposed policy indicated in the above statement would eventually be realized in the form of the Junior Certificate, as the next section will detail.

3.4.3 The Junior Certificate

The Junior Certificate, in its current three-year format, was introduced in 1989 and first assessed in 1992. In the stated aims and objectives accompanying this new phase of assessment, the Irish State claimed that,

> the general aim of education is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual, including aesthetic, creative, critical, cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, political, social and spiritual development, for personal and family life, for working life, for living in the community and for leisure'(DES, 2000, p.1).

Two areas of concern, stated at the time the Junior Certificate was introduced, were assessment and implementation. As a result, one change to the Junior Certificate from its earlier format, was the introduction of levels of assessment. There would be two levels: Ordinary Level and Higher Level. In the Syllabus documentation accompanying this cycle, it is noted, that, '…there will be a variety of modes of assessment, depending on the options taken. It may not be possible to assess all the above [stated] objectives within each mode of assessment' (DES, 2000, p. 8).

Moreover, it is important to note that the number of subjects available for study under the Junior Certificate continues to vary from school to school. Students also have a degree of choice regarding the number of subjects they choose to study for this certificate. All students must undertake a minimum requirement of six and a maximum of fifteen, with most electing to receive instruction in nine on average (DES, 2011). At present, English; History; Irish; Mathematics are the only subjects which remain compulsory under for the Junior Cycle (NCCA Online). It is worth noting here that history became a mandatory subject in 2019, following both academic and public criticism of a state decision to make this subject optional (Irish Times, 2019).

Following the introduction of the Junior Certificate in 1989, international market changes led to an increase in the demand for scientific thinking in the Irish workforce. This demand was observed in the contents of a significant policy document (ICSTI, 1993, p.3), which noted that, '…as never before, science and technology are at the heart of issues in everyday life. The school system must reflect this changing environment by making changes to courses and processes at an appropriate level'. Following this report, '…a revision was undertaken to address the concerns raised, to reflect best practice internationally and to support the provision of a science education for the 21st century' (NCCA, 2002). Despite this demand in the labour market, it is worth noting that changes in curriculum practice relating to science education and technology did not begin to change until the end of the millennium. However, responding to other pressures about the effectiveness of the Junior Cycle, the Minister for Education, Niamh Bhreathnach, asked the NCCA to review the existing curriculum framework in 1996 (NCCA, 2004). A year later, the newly appointed Minister for Education, Micheál Martin, again issued a request to the NCCA to implement changes to the lower second level curriculum (NCCA, 2004). Acting upon these calls for reform, the NCCA established a review of the Junior Certificate, nearly a

decade after its introduction in the second-level classroom. This review was organized in the form of a progress report which will be outlined in the next section.

3.4.4 The Junior Cycle Review: Progress Report

In his 1997 request to the NCCA, Minister Martin, outlined four areas of the Junior Cycle curriculum which needed to be reviewed:

- Whether the values supporting the curriculum had been fully achieved.
- Whether existing participation rates and grades in the different subjects indicate signs of underachievement.
- Whether existing assessment procedures met the needs of curriculum and syllabus outcomes and goals.
- Whether literacy and numeracy needs were being fully addressed (NCCA, 2004,).

The findings published in this review identified a number of areas for improvement in relation to the Junior Cycle, but highlighted the issue of summative assessment in particular as a key point of concern. The report noted that, '…the extent to which the curriculum had met the needs of all students' is directly linked to the question of '…whether the current assessment arrangements were appropriate to the curriculum aims and objectives' (NCCA, 1999, as cited in MacPhail et al, 2018, p.315). In particular, the report highlighted the following concerns pertaining to examination practices:

(i)   A divergence between the aims and objectives of the Junior Cycle and the mode of examination used to assess these outcomes.

(ii)   A trend within approaches to teaching and learning that focuses too closely on exam preparation, rather than other areas of the curriculum and syllabus.

(iii)   A tendency amongst educators to 'teach to the test', rather than provide a holistic education to students.

(iv)   An absent link between formative assessment in the classroom and examination for the purpose of certification.

(v)   Evidence to suggest that students at risk of leaving school early school were deterred by terminal exams.

(vi)   Administrative problems in recruiting a sufficient number of external examiners to assess student work. (NCCA, 2004).

Arising from the concerns noted above, it was recommended that a system of school-based assessment should be introduced to the curriculum in order to meet students' needs. This proposal was met with strong resistance from both teaching unions in Ireland (ASTI and the TUI), who refused to support this reform. This dispute resulted in the former body withdrawing from the discussion process, while the latter indicated that unless a number of key conditions were met, it would not comply with any changes to the assessment procedures. Regarding this issue, the education officer representing the TUI stated,

> Unless the assessment issue is resolved there is no way forward for the Junior Cert…we are not idealogically opposed to school-based assessment, but we do have a number of conditions. These include external monitoring, payment for the extra work incurred by teachers, time to be allowed for assessment and special and adequate training. The TUI will participate in the consultation process and remain open and positive about addressing the problems of the Junior Cert, he promises. However, we're not interested in putting a lot of effort into designing an assessment system that goes nowhere (Fitzpatrick, Irish Times, 1999).

It is worth highlighting this industrial relations issues between the Irish State and the teachers' unions at this early stage in the Junior Cycle reform process, as it would again prove to be a key point of impasse in the most recent attempt at curriculum reform, nearly two decades later, as subsequent sections will detail. Following on from this dispute, a compromise was reached between the teachers' representatives and the Government, resulting in a number of changes to the Junior Cycle, which were as follows:

- New syllabi in Religious Education; SPHE; Mathematics and Science
- Development of a curriculum framework for Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
- Trialling an assessment for learning (AFL) initiative within schooling (NCCA, 2004)

It can be observed that at this stage, no structural changes were introduced to the Junior Cycle curriculum which mandated an overall change to assessment practices for subjects at this level

of certification. However, it should be noted that in relation science, one of the main recommendations included in this report was that '…school-based practical assessment should be implemented within three years.' (Irish Council for Science, Technology and Innovation, 1999, p. 4). While, at a more general level, '…schools were given the option of taking up the revised syllabus when it was introduced in 2003. Approximately 90% of schools introduced the revised syllabus in the 2003/2004 school years' (NCCA, 2002a, n.p.). It was at this point that the Junior Certificate, started to extend more gradually towards the curricular integration of market-oriented outcomes. These changes were linked, in part, to the establishment of a new educational body, in the form of the State Examinations Commission [SEC], which will be outlined in the next section.

3.4.5 The State Examinations Commission

The State Examinations Commission [SEC] was established in 2003 with the primary responsibility of overseeing certificate level examination within second-level schooling. The SEC is described as '…a non-departmental public body under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills' [Examinations.ie]. Within this official capacity, it is responsible for '…the development, assessment, accreditation and certification of the second-level examinations of the Irish State – the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate' [Education.gov.ie]. Following the establishment of this organization, Ireland now has two separate bodies with separate roles pertaining to assessment and examination at second-level – the NCCA and the SEC. The former body counsels on assessment and examinations while the latter manages the public examination system (Hyland, 2014). Both groups report to the Minister for Education and Skills who holds the power to exercise all final judgments on decisions relating to curriculum and assessment. Coinciding with these whole school changes to the lower second-level curriculum, the Irish State, through its main educational body, launched its first ever large-scale exploration of students' experiences of the Junior Cycle.

3.4.6 Students' Experiences of The Junior Cycle: 2002-2006

In 2002, the NCCA commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to conduct a major longitudinal study of students' experiences of the Junior Cycle curriculum. This study documented the experiences of 900 students in twelve schools using a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (NCCA, 2004). This study was divided into three phases, looking firstly at the experiences of first and second year students; secondly, the experiences of third year students, and thirdly, the latter's aspirations in relation to their various options for Senior Cycle. The aims of the first phase within this study were twofold '…to capture second year students' experiences of teaching, learning and the curriculum, and to trace the changes in students' attitudes to school and schoolwork over the course of second year' (NCCA, 2006, p.2). The findings generated by this study found that the summative examinations which students complete for their Junior Certificate were already becoming a significant aspect in their lives (NCCA, 2006). Additionally, it was recorded that these examinations held a significant impact on how the curriculum was implemented by teachers in schools and by extension, an increased pressure placed on students to achieve (NCCA, 2007). As a result, the main author notes that,

> Findings from the longitudinal study raise a number of issues for policy development regarding junior cycle education. It is evident that the presence of the Junior Certificate exam influences the nature of teaching and learning, especially in third year, with the focus narrowing to one of preparation for the exam (Smyth, 2009, p.4).

Almost immediately following this report, the second phase of the study was actioned and completed. This phase explored the experiences of third year students, facing a state examination for the first time. The aim of this study was to identify new measures which schools could take in order to both improve student learning and their engagement with school. Following on from the experience of second year students, a gradual decline was observed in pupils' attitudes towards schooling in their third year, largely due to teachers becoming firmer

in their approach to learning, due to a pressure to perform at exam level (NCCA, 2007). It is worth noting that in the commentary section of this report, a clear pattern of 'good teaching' was indicated amongst the majority of students surveyed across the three years of study. These characteristics included '…providing a clear explanation of subject matter, using varied approaches, and fostering a supportive classroom environment in which students feel comfortable about asking questions are keys to effective teaching and learning'.

By contrast, it was noted that '…teaching 'from the text' according to the students, does not maintain their interest and, together with the absence of positive feedback in the classroom, may contribute to students' disengagement from the learning process' (NCCA, 2007, p.13). This phase of the report also looked at the existing curriculum provision for Junior Cycle, with a particular focus on the number of subjects studied by students and the weekly lesson time allocated to each. Overall, it was concluded that '…schools can and do make choices about what subjects they offer, and how many…school decisions, then, have a strong influence on the nature, quality and breadth of the Junior Cycle curriculum' (NCCA, pp.17-18). The final phase of this report looked at the aspirations of third year students in relation to their choices for Senior Cycle. All students in third year must choose from a number of different pathways available to them, with a final decision due before they sit their summative examinations in June each year. All students have a choice of the following pathways for Senior Cycle:

- Leaving Certificate Established (LCE)

- Transition Year (TY)

- Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)

In the case of this study, it was recorded that 43% of students in the case study schools took Transition Year; 32% took the Leaving Certificate Established; 20% took the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and 5% took Leaving Certificate Applied. One of the key

overall findings from this report was that many of the options '…available to students entering senior cycle have, in fact, been decided upon and pre-determined much earlier by the nature of the education system and by the actions of schools'. The report concludes by highlighting this issue is linked to the relationship between schooling and society which '…is the set of expectations that society has of this stage of education. The study establishes that '…pathways in senior cycle are determined by the experience of Junior Cycle' (NCCA, p.44). Ultimately, it begs an important question, asking '…should the experience of 13 year olds be shaped to such an extent by the expectations we have of 18 year olds?' (NCCA, p.45). The insights and limitations presented by this study acted as a point of continuation for the research scope of this thesis. For example, one notable point of absence in the foregoing study was the omission of any inquiry into students' perceptions of subject learning and related choices for their Senior Cycle. This gap in knowledge formed the specific point of focus which the empirical study that was carried out as part of this thesis would seek to address.

Recently, an NCCA review of the lower second-level curriculum has led to the introduction of a New Junior Cycle. This reform focuses on a more skills-based approach to learning and at the time of writing is near the end of its six-year integration phase in second-level schooling. The details of this revision, and differences between it and the original Junior Certificate will be provided in the next section.

3.4.7 The New Junior Cycle: Structural Changes

Following the announcement of the New Junior Cycle in 2011, official plans for the structural changes of this curriculum were detailed in a document titled *A Framework for Junior Cycle 2012*. Broadly speaking, the main changes which emerged in this document on the new Junior Cycle curriculum fall within three categories, namely: assessment; skill-based outcomes and accreditation. In its own listing of similarities between the new curriculum, and its predecessor, the NCCA states that: '…The New Junior Cycle features newly developed subjects and short

courses, a focus on key skills, and new approaches to assessment and reporting' [NCCA.ie, 2012]. While other minor changes have been introduced surrounding the areas of syllabus and subject specification, many of the older features of the Junior Cycle which are already familiar to teachers, have been retained. (NCCA, 2012). In listing new features of the New Junior Cycle, the NCCA indicates the following:

- The new curriculum will be underpinned by eight principles; six key skills and twenty four statements of learning.

- The curriculum will place a greater emphasis on literacy, numeracy and the development of six key skills

- The new Junior Cycle has a maximum of 10 subjects at state exam level, whereas up until now most students did 11 exam subjects.

- A mixture of both formative and summative forms of assessment in relation to each subject

- The syllabus or specifications for many subjects has changed or is in the process of changing.

- The learning outcomes associated with each topic are subject specific.
- Many of the outcomes associated with new subject specifications of a practical or applied nature.

- By 2020 all of the Junior Cycle subjects in our school will have new specifications laying out the framework of what students should learn over coming years.

- A change in how student achievements are described in Junior Cycle subjects.

  [A B C D E grades are now being replaced by descriptors as each new subject Is introduced. The Descriptors are: • Distinction • Higher Merit • Merit • Achieved • Partially Achieved]

- The old Junior Certificate accreditation is being replaced by the new Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement. (NCCA, 2012)

It is important to note that the planning, development and implementation of the New Junior Cycle programme is underpinned by eight principles, which can be listed as follows:

- Learning to Learn

- Choice and Flexibility

- Quality

- Creativity and innovation

- Engagement and participation

- Continuity and development

- Inclusive education

- Wellbeing [NCCA, 2015]

These principles act as the theoretical foundation upon which student learning is based under curriculum reform and reflect its overall ambitions and direction. These principles, in turn, are designed to facilitate classroom practitioners in implementing the six key skills of this reform, namely:

- Being Creative

- Communicating

- Managing Myself

- Managing information and Thinking

- Staying Well

- Working with Others [NCCA, 2015]

Finally, the successful implementation of these key skills, should serve the overall objective of supporting learners in achieving the desired outcomes specified under this reform. These outcomes are outlined in twenty-four statements of learning which a Junior Cycle student should ideally achieve over the course of the three-year cycle. These statements of learning can be seen in figure 3.1 below:

Fig 3.1: Statements of Learning

Statements of Learning

	The student
1	communicates effectively using a variety of means in a range of contexts in L1*
2	listens, speaks, reads and writes in L2* and one other language at a level of proficiency that is appropriate to her or his ability
3	creates, appreciates and critically interprets a wide range of texts
4	creates and presents artistic works and appreciates the process and skills involved
5	has an awareness of personal values and an understanding of the process of moral decision making
6	appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which she/he lives
7	values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts
8	values local, national and international heritage, understands the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change
9	understands the origins and impacts of social, economic, and environmental aspects of the world around her/him
10	has the awareness, knowledge, skills, values and motivation to live sustainably
11	takes action to safeguard and promote her/his wellbeing and that of others
12	is a confident and competent participant in physical activity and is motivated to be physically active
13	understands the importance of food and diet in making healthy lifestyle choices
14	makes informed financial decisions and develops good consumer skills
15	recognises the potential uses of mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding in all areas of learning
16	describes, illustrates, interprets, predicts and explains patterns and relationships
17	devises and evaluates strategies for investigating and solving problems using mathematical knowledge, reasoning and skills
18	observes and evaluates empirical events and processes and draws valid deductions and conclusions
19	values the role and contribution of science and technology to society, and their personal, social and global importance
20	uses appropriate technologies in meeting a design challenge
21	applies practical skills as she/he develop models and products using a variety of materials and technologies
22	takes initiative, is innovative and develops entrepreneurial skills
23	brings an idea from conception to realisation
24	uses technology and digital media tools to learn, communicate, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner

*L1 is the language medium of the school (Irish in Irish-medium schools). L2 is the second language (English in Irish-medium schools).

Perhaps the most significant change to Junior Cycle education proposed by the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (DES, 2012) is in the area of assessment, which marked an important shift away

from traditional approaches to the measurement of learning. This framework seeks to improve students' learning experiences through changes to curriculum and assessment, by replacing the Junior Certificate examination with a new school-based model of assessment (DES, 2015). Subsequently, in a move away from a terminal written exam, the biggest difference for students throughout the course of the three-year cycle is the introduction of new 'Classroom Based Assessments' (CBA) which take place between second and third year for students, during normal class time. Subjects will continue to be offered in two separate tiers of learning for students: ordinary and higher level. At each level, assessment in all subjects will take the form of a terminal examination paper and coursework by the end of the year 2021. The outcomes of these assessments, along with the outcomes of final examinations, will be recorded in a new Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement [JCPA], rather than the traditional 'certificate' award [Irish Times, 2017]. The JCPA is a new kind of award that will replace the Junior Certificate from 2017. This award will report on student achievement across a broad range of areas of learning over the course of the Junior Cycle. This award is designed to offer stakeholders a holistic picture of students' learning journey over the three years of Junior Cycle and may include their extra-curricular achievements e.g. sporting accomplishments or participation in drama club [NCCA, 2015].

Depending on the subject, the coursework element of assessment will include students keeping portfolios of their work; submitting a written piece and in some cases, completing an audio-visual interview (NCCA, 2011). In most cases, the coursework completed by students is prescribed and chosen by the classroom teacher before the beginning of the academic year. However, in a move towards student-centredness, students have the option of undertaking an investigation of their own choice and submitting a portfolio on aspects of that investigation in certain subjects (NCCA, 2011). For example, in English, students must now complete a CBA in the form of an oral communication which details their findings on an area of interest from a

list of optional topics made available to them e.g. celebrities or poetry (NCCA, 2011). The topics which are offered to students for exploration vary from year to year and upon submission will contribute to 10% of the overall grade they receive for that subject (JCT, 2015). This element of assessment serves two functions – namely, the development of students' research skills and their ability to communicate information:

> students are given an opportunity to choose a topic or issue that is of interest or importance to them and to carry out an exploration over time. The development of basic research skills will be central here, e.g. searching for information, reading and note-making, organising material, using key questions to give shape to ideas, developing a point of view, preparing a presentation, using props, hand-outs etc. [JC Curriculum Specification, 2014]

This excerpt from the new Junior Cycle specification offers a representative account of the overall shift in narrative which the new curriculum hopes to introduce i.e. a shift from knowledge acquisition to skill development. It is important to note here that attempts to introduce the new curriculum in the format described above were fraught with difficulty from the beginning. The main reason behind this disruption was due to a political dispute between the Teachers' Union of Ireland [TUI] and the Irish State, following the announcement of this curriculum reform (TUI, 2014). At a public level, this dispute primarily centred around the proposed workload which school-based assessments would bring to bear on teachers, as well the wisdom of teachers correcting the work of their own students at the level of official accreditation. Questions were also raised about whether the motives behind this form were entirely in the learners' interest, or also perhaps, linked to a trend relating to the international financial crisis. In the words of one author:

> The arguments about Junior Cycle reform increasingly suggest that the debate is only about teachers assessing their own students. This is a most misleading framing and fails to reveal the true story. The true story is that we live in a time of austerity when European governments are being told they must diminish the size of each nation state, reduce the public sector and let the markets dictate [Mooney-Simmie, 2015, p.3].

This clash between unions and the Irish State lasted nearly three years until a compromise was reached which ended the industrial relations dispute and restored a balance of peace to post-primary schools. As a result, near the end of 2014, the teacher unions and government agreed

that the New Junior Cycle would be fully introduced into all schools, with a view phasing out the old curriculum over a six-year period (NCCA, 2011). The agreed changes between both stakeholders were outlined in a revised document titled *A Framework for Junior Cycle 2015*. This document represented a balanced compromise between the aims of both sides, particularly in relation to the area of assessment. The differences between the vision of assessment outlined in the 2012 and 2015 editions of the *Framework* can be seen clearly in the following excerpts. The form policy document indicated that '…the current Junior Certificate examination will be phased out and replaced by a classroom-based approach to assessment. Junior cycle assessment, both formative and summative, will be school-based and focus on supporting learning' (DES, 2012, p. 26). While, the latter policy document put forward the instruction that, '…all assessment in junior cycle, formative or summative, moment-in-time or ongoing, SEC, NCCA or teacher-designed, should have as its primary purpose, the support of student learning' (DES, 2015, p. 35). In this way, the revised *Framework* sought to strike a balance between the needs of teachers; students and the demands of the Irish State alike. This balance is indicated in the new format which involves a

> dual approach to assessment, involving classroom-based assessment across the three years and a final externally-assessed, national examination can enable the appropriate balance between preparing students for examinations and also facilitating creative thinking, engaged learning and better outcomes for students (DES, 2015, p. 35).

It is intended that this approach will acknowledge the various intelligences and individual achievements which occur in schools by offering a more holistic approach to the assessment of students (MacPhail, Halbert & O'Neill, 2018). Despite these changes in assessment practices, it is worth pointing out that grading under the New Junior Cycle remains heavily weighted in favour of summative examination and therefore, the effectiveness of this change upon students' overall experiences remains unclear.

3.5 Junior Cycle Reform: 2011-2020

As previously stated, official plans for the new Junior Cycle curriculum were first published in 2011 during a national economic crisis, when a conservative government under Taoiseach Kenny outlined its intentions to bring about changes to lower secondary schooling in a national policy document. This proposed reform coincided with broader changes in the Irish economy, which saw a particular focus placed upon higher education and schooling as a collective route toward economic re-growth. This document acted as a blueprint for the proposed revision of the Junior Certificate, which would be phased out over a six-year period and replaced with a new skill-heavy curriculum and school-based model of assessment.

As with changes that took place in schooling at the turn of the century, this proposed strategy for curriculum reform identified teachers as important agents of change in the implementation of this process (NCCA, 2011). This approach was outlined in a draft version of the reform document, wherein the Irish State placed a renewed emphasis on schools and teachers as drivers of policy transmission '…we want to focus attention on the school as the site of innovation, and on teachers and school leaders as the agents of any change process' (2011, p.5). In doing so, the government under Taoiseach Kenny sought to introduce an onus of accountability on teachers for student achievement, by charging them with the overall task of delivering the ambitions contained within this reform (Allais, 2012; Lynch, 2012; Furlong, 2013). To ensure the success of this skills-based reform, Taoiseach Kenny's government adopted a new regulatory approach to schooling. This new framework operates as a means through which the Irish State can monitor and control the implementation of reform policies within schooling. As one author notes, this framework represented a clear move by the Irish State to '…retain strong relays of power and symbolic control of assessment, monitoring and performativity through a regulatory framework and a complex rubric of top-down monitoring, surveillance and inspections' (Mooney-Simmie, 2014, p.194). With these structural measures in place, the Irish

State set about finalizing the overall role and direction which this reform would play in wider social and economic affairs.

From the offset, the rationale underpinning the proposed framework for Junior Cycle reform reflected the Irish State's intention to merge market interests with the role of learning in schooling. The impetus behind the Junior Cycle reform was first laid out in a draft policy document published by the NCCA which stated (NCCA, 2010, p.6) that in the context of the '…global economic crisis…schools are being asked to shape the next generation of creative problem solvers who can quite literally, 'save the world''. Consequently, the goal of this reform was to place a strategic emphasis upon the development of skills among young learners in order to prepare them for the twenty-first century workforce (NCCA, 2011). To achieve this goal, the NCCA outlined six key skills underpinned by digital technology which would play a core role in student development. These skills, in turn, were embedded within twenty-four statements of learning, more than half of which require or promote technological use as part of their planned outcome (NCCA, 2012). This strategy is best exemplified in the words of Ball (2008, pp. 59-60) who observed that '…the idea is to empower the teachers to use IT as a tool for classroom teaching. The market for IT in schools is large and growing and the policy climate is encouraging the participation of businesses in state schooling as a way of 'improving' the quality of education'. Adopting this tactic, the Irish State invited consultation on this reform process from a number of multi-national business corporations in an effort to embed these skills within the new curriculum. As one such stakeholder wrote:

> Ibec welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on Junior Cycle Science by making a submission to the NCCA. The ambition to change from a curriculum based primarily on "knowledge and content" to one in which skills development focuses on knowledge of and about science is welcomed by industry (NCCA, 2013, P.2).

This excerpt succinctly captures the way in which the government under Taoiseach Kenny planned to utilize the Junior Cycle curriculum reform as part of its continued effort to incorporate market driven learning within education. Commenting on this reform, Walsh

(2012, p.34) noted that only '…those subjects that are considered central to the economy (the so-called STEM subjects) will be prioritized', while all other forms of subject learning assume a role of secondary importance. Evidence of this strategy soon became apparent, which can be seen through the Irish State's partnership with over fifty organizations, tasked with raising awareness of STEM careers among Junior Cycle students through career events and guest speakers (Irish Times, 2016). The effects of this strategy are well documented in the statistics recorded by the Central Applications Office [CAO], the body responsible for matriculation in Ireland, which have outlined a clear shift in in students' third-level preferences, since 2008. In particular, a pattern has emerged which indicates a sharp rise in the number of students choosing to pursue STEM related courses after school compared to pre-recession figures. As one journalist observes '…the last recession saw tradition turn on its head as students abandoned arts courses and chose science, technology, engineering and maths courses instead' [McGuire, Irish Times, 2019]. For example, for a three-year period following 2011, there were over 15,000 jobs announced in Ireland related to ICT, which amounted to nearly one hundred jobs per week (Freeman, Irish Times, 2014). Linked to this growth, there was a strong increase in the number of STEM related organizations raising awareness of national employment demands in Irish secondary schools during this period. This shift mirrored an international demand for STEM graduates in the global marketplace is evidenced in the overt shift which has taken place in national employment demands. The economic rationale underpinning this approach is captured well in the following excerpt which forewarns that:

> The loss of potential Stem graduates has a very real impact on our economic wellbeing, given the demand for qualified graduates needed to feed into the multinationals and the many indigenous companies involved in high-tech exports. If Ireland cannot meet the demand then we become a less attractive option for foreign direct investment [Irish Times, 2017].

Resulting from this demand, there has been a strong rise in the number students choosing STEM related courses since the introduction of the new Junior Cycle. This information is

broken down in the table below which outlines an exponential increase in STEM applications to the CAO over the past decade [statistics since 2007 included for comparative purposes].

Table 3.1: Breakdown of CAO choices

Year	STEM Applications [1st Preference]	STEM Applications [Total]
2007	10,175	68293
2008	10, 571	68,719
2009	14,117	70,016
2010	15,743	77,021
2011	12,294	80,735
2012	13,579	86,014
2013	13,901	86,136
2014	14,364	88,850
2015	14,666	88,554
2016	15,240	90,980
2017	15,341	88,637
2018	9,978	49,624
2019	12,149	53,119
*2020	12,104	64,497
2021	16,213	107,132

[*Note: These figures were recorded prior to the Covid-19 pandemic]

Supporting this general trend recorded in this table, one questionnaire indicated that 58% of students under the age of 18 would consider a STEM career (SFI, 2015). Consequently, it is unsurprising that there has been a 23% increase in the number of people employed in the STEM sector in Ireland since 2010, representing nearly one third of the national workforce [Irish

Times, 2016]. However, as indicated above, preferences for STEM courses dropped sharply for a period of two years as the number of applications has failed to meet the projected requirements necessary to match economic demand [CAO 2018; 2019]. One possible reason for this decline may have been the historic success of the Irish economy during this period i.e. as economy peaked, students were less likely to pursue courses or careers for reasons linked to job security or financial assurance. While speculative, this hypothesis would represent an inversion of the motivations cited for the post-recession uptake in these areas of learning by several academics (Holborow, 2012; Lynch, 2016). Despite this decline, it should be noted that the overall number of applications for STEM courses has risen considerably when compared to pre-recession figures. These figures rose again in 2020, with some sources suggesting that the upsurge in demand for these subject areas may have been linked to the economic uncertainty which arose following Britain's exit from the European Union (Irish Times, 2017; SFI, 2020). Lastly, the CAO figures released in 2021 showed that the global pandemic caused a significant upsurge in the number of students who applied for courses relating to these areas. This period of international turmoil witnessed the highest number of STEM applications received in the recorded history of the CAO. Later chapters will argue that this rise in demand lends support to the hypothesis that applications for courses which are linked to economic security tend to rise during periods of economic uncertainty.

3.5.1 Junior Cycle: A Summary 1989-2020

This section sought to provide a sequential overview of the Junior Cycle in Irish secondary schooling. It achieved this task by presenting a detailed breakdown of changes in the lower second-level curriculum from the introduction of the Junior Certificate and culminating in what students are studying today. This outline included the evolution of the curriculum since the creation of the Intermediate Certificate and the evolution of Junior Certificate from the late-1980s, resulting in the recently revised New Junior Cycle, which has attempted to introduce a

more practically-based work load for students. The section also looked in some detail at the various changes to the structure and content of the lower second-level curriculum as it has evolved over the past thirty years. In particular, it highlighted the various syllabi; issues surrounding assessment; and changes to the curriculum structure, as per official policy documents. In addition, it also sought to offer some critique the various changes listed above, drawn from both historical and contemporary sources.

It was observed that three predominant themes appear to run through this history of curriculum development in the Irish Junior Cycle. The first is the transition from general to practical and applied learning within schooling; the second, is changes in the length and types of assessment used to measure learning and the third, is a shift in discourse, from the language of civic development to that of market outcomes in relation to learning for students. Building on this shift in curricular narrative, the next section will offer a critique of the changes to learning brought about by Junior Cycle reform.

3.6 The New Junior Cycle: A Critical Analysis

This section will attempt to analyze the recent changes to learning which have taken place under the new Junior Cycle reform from a critical perspective. To achieve this, it will look at how the new Junior Cycle functions as a component within the Irish State's overall plan to merge its economic ambitions with outcomes in schooling. In particular, it will highlight how the Irish State has attempted to bolster its economic development through increased skill development and increasing the numbers of participation in key subjects by re-aligning the core focus of the Junior Cycle curriculum with a competitive market ideology. The critical exploration provided in this section will act as a neat platform upon which the research methodology will be built in the next chapter.

As previously established, secondary education in Ireland is currently undergoing a period of transition in which the rationale guiding student reform continue to be merged with national

market ambitions (NCCA, 2011; 2012; 2015). The primary way the Irish State has attempted to achieve this shift is by using Junior Cycle reform as a means '…to ensure the continuous development of a pipeline of talent to support Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)' through an increased focus on STEM Education (SERG, 2016, P.1). This tactical approach to policy development has resulted in a wholesale reform the Junior Cycle in an effort to re-align student learning with market-based outcomes. This pattern was noted in a significant study by Mooney-Simmie (2014) who explored the rationale behind the proposed reform using a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of five national policy documents (NCCA, 2010; 2011; 2014, DES, 2012; 2014). The conclusions drawn from this analysis indicated that Junior Cycle reform is markedly shaped by a neo-liberal discourse, which serves to meet the interests of the market economy. For example, the author notes that the '…language of the economy has come to dominate contemporary education policy discourses, with terminology, such as 'quality', 'excellence', 'best practice' and 'accountability'' (Mooney-Simmie, 2014, p.186). The economic rationale underpinning this transition from schooling as a public good to a private service is captured well in the words of Allais (2012, p.253), who writes:

> The progressive discourse of education and the terminology associated with it, such as 'childcentred education', 'human potential', 'liberation', 'care', 'equality of opportunity', have become increasingly replaced in official policy discourses with new specialised language drawn from neoclassical economics, with its own distinctive terminology, such as 'quality', 'excellence', 'individualism', 'choice', 'best practice', 'competition', 'outputs' and 'outcomes'.

Lynch (2012) argues that this shift in focus described above is characterized through the re-branding of the 'Department of Education' as the 'Department of Education *and Skills*' (emphasis added) in 2010. From a critical perspective, this focus on market-led outcomes directly contradicts the purpose of schooling by reducing learning to capital driven ends. As one author puts it '…gearing schools to labor force preparations undermines the democratic and social purposes of education' (Lipman, 2006, p.46). Within this neo-liberal conception of schooling, students begin to assume the function of raw material designed to serve needs of a

knowledge economy (Coles, 2018). This logic is captured well in the words of McLaren (2000, p.169), who states '…neoliberal education merely re-imposes the commodity status of labour power by treating students as human capital for the new global marketplace'. Through this strategy, increased pressures are placed on students to achieve within schooling and to develop the necessary skills required to compete for positions within the labour market. As one academic puts it, this approach to learning '…is a depressingly instrumentalist one where education is mistaken for training' (Foley, Irish Times, 2019). The impact of these shifts within schooling has been the cultivation of a high-stakes approach to learning in which students are expected to become the output which schooling produces. Although these changes have been termed 'progressive', it is argued here that learning within schooling continues to be viewed by stakeholders through a traditional lens. This is to suggest that student learning remains understood as a labour expectation, rather than a labour exploitation. On this point, Zinnecker (2001, p.45) is worth quoting at length:

> The working activities during childhood moratorium are disguised by pedagogical ideologies…Learning is not understood as a type of work, whereby children contribute productively to the future social and economic development of society. Only the adult work of teachers is emphasized as productive contribution to the development of human capital. The corresponding activities of pupils are thus defined, not as work but as a form of intellectual consumption.

Zinnecker (2001) describes this process as a 'pedagogical mask' which disguises the reality that schools now create workers who possess a skillset which requires zero investment cost on the part of employers and exceeds their wage value. In this way, he suggests, '…the development of human capital [in schools]…acts as a sink for students' hidden labour'.

A second implication of this market driven approach to teaching and learning is that the value of learning becomes redefined in relation to profit and economic growth, rather than civic or personal development (Morrissey, 2013). For example, it has also been argued from a critical perspective that policymakers '…justify the curriculum focus on science and math under the guise of practicality and their low cost compared to other subjects from humanities and art'

(Shahsavari-Googhari, 2017, p.19).   A similar trend has been recently noted in the UK where the '…English A-level have seen their numbers decline by one-fifth over the past three years, with sciences up by the same amount' as electing to pursue the humanities can be understood as '…a risky choice for students in such an economically insecure period' (McInerney, Guardian, 2019). In this way, it may be argued that students' extrinsic motivations outweigh their intrinsic motivations, when faced with the difficult choice of learning for labour or learning for personal interest. By extension of this phenomenon, subject areas which do not offer a direct economic return on investment receive less investment and lose legitimacy within schooling (Seery, as cited in Walsh, 2012). Examples of this shift can be seen through attempts to make subjects such as Geography and Irish optional in schooling under the new Junior Cycle (Irish Times, 2018). By outsourcing the new Junior Cycle in this way, it is argued that the Irish State has attempted to bring about a uniform change in the way that students view certain forms of subject knowledge and make early career choices, based upon their perceptions of learning in schooling. Such efforts reflect an explicit attempt by the Irish State to afford sole focus to learning which can be used in service of the global economy and in so doing, '…turn knowledge into money' (Walsh, 2012, p.169). As Ball (2012, p.33) notes, this neo-liberal approach to schooling has led to a situation in which learning is reduced to the '…creation of skills or of profit rather than ideals' and can be '…summed up in Lyotard's terms in a shift from the questions 'Is it true?' and 'Is it just?' to 'Is it useful, saleable, efficient?''.

Further changes within lower secondary reform have attempted to place a greater level of responsibility on the role of the classroom teacher by restructuring assessment practices (DES, 2012). Evidence of this can be seen in a series of framework documents which mark a transition from external State-run summative assessment to internal school-based assessments (DES, 2012; DES, 2015). One author (Mooney-Simmie, 2015) argues that this shift in assessment practice forms part of the austerity agenda introduced by the Irish State in the immediate

aftermath of its financial crash, as a cost-saving measure which could save the Government up to twenty-five million euro per annum. This view was also endorsed by Ireland's leading teaching union (TUI), the president of whom outlined its stance that '…the austerity agenda was a key driver' behind Junior Cycle reform (Quinn, Irish Times, 2014). A second way this change in assessment practices serves to benefit the Irish State is by transferring the burden of success onto teachers for the overall reform process. It has been argued that this transition toward teacher-led forms of assessment represents an attempt to increase the accountability levels of classroom practioners by placing them under increased pressure to both raise standards of learning and improve measurable outcomes (MacPhail, Halbert & O'Neil, 2018). This shift in discourse towards assessment and monitoring closely resembles what Kincheloe (2002, p.110) refers to as 'instrumental rationality' in which school practices begin to closely resemble the structure and aims of businesses. Through such re-organization, both teacher practice and student learning become standardized, thus making them easier to regulate, while simultaneously shifting responsibility away from the state. Holborow (2012, p.24) has described this state-led strategy as an 'ideological offensive' that has been instigated with the explicit function of 'commercialising' schooling toward market outcomes. Viewed concurrently, it can be argued that many of the structural changes introduced in the new Junior Cycle mark the continuation of a pathway in Irish secondary schooling which is governed by the logic and principles of enterprise.

In response to such ideological shifts in schooling, writers in the critical tradition have sought to challenge what they perceive to be the influence of neo-liberal capitalism upon schooling. This outlook toward schooling operates from the premise that '…all schools serve the societies in which they are embedded' (Ayers, 2016, p.39) and '…reproduce dominant values that ultimately work counter to the very democratic ideals that schools seemingly promote' (Nikolakaki, 2012, p.121). Given this problem, thinkers such as Giroux (1978) have called for

teachers and students to develop pedagogies of resistance against capital-driven learning. Such an approach would require teachers and students to develop an ability to question how the curriculum operates in schooling by exploring the influence it seeks to have upon student learning (Dickerson, 2007). This approach to pedagogy borrows from the Freirean position that '…education and cultural processes aimed at liberation do not succeed by freeing people from their chains, but by preparing them collectively to free themselves' (Mclaren, 2000, p.175). Although he does not go so far as to claim that students can escape the ideologies which shape their learning experience, Giroux agrees with Freire that the '…resistance presented by students opens up tiny but significant spaces for new forms of power' (Freire as cited in Giroux, 1983, p.12). By attempting to empower students in this way, a Marcusian notion (1965) is invoked that seeks to subvert the effects of market discourse in schooling through the enactment of a repressive tolerance. In the words of Marcuse (1965, p.113) '…unless the student learns to think in the opposite direction…they will be inclined to place facts into the predominant framework of values'. In this way, critical approaches to learning seek to enable students to recognize and question, rather than conform to the influence of dominant ideologies.

This section has attempted to provide a critical perspective of the new Junior Cycle curriculum reform by providing a critique of the market driven changes which it has attempted to introduce. In doing so, this exploration has attempted to explicate the market-led assumptions which continue to direct the outcomes of Irish secondary schooling through this reform. It was noted that many of the curricular changes which have occurred in the new Junior Cycle can be attributed to shifting demands in the Irish economy, contrary to the stated intentions outlined in various supporting policy documents.

3.7 Conclusion

The changes to the Junior Cycle curriculum described in this chapter represent a culmination of the wider socio-economic developments which have taken place in Irish society over the

past fifty years. The national decision to adopt free-market European trade policies was a key turning point in the rationale governing public services within Irish society. From this point forward, the thinking which underpinned the structures and policies of social amenities, such as education and healthcare, began to resemble the principles of private-sphere capitalism. This shift meant that two-tier systems of development began to emerge in relation to public access for everyday services and social inequality became a more pervasive issue within Irish society (Lynch, 1989). In relation to education, successive Irish governments sought to realize the demands of these economic policies repurposing schools and universities as conduits for the international labour market. To achieve this objective, a series of key policy papers were promulgated prior to millennium, which outlined a new vision for teaching and learning in Irish schooling. The rationale guiding these policies was realized through a series of structural changes which increased the level of accountability placed on schools in attaining state-mandated objectives (King, 2017). Similarly, regulatory bodies and practices were put in place which re-imagined the outcomes of learning in terms of competition, regulation and quality control. As this chapter has shown, the main vehicle through which these changes have been introduced is lower-second level curriculum reform. Ultimately, it has been claimed that the New Junior Cycle represents a union of the underlying principles and ideals which have gradually emerged over the past half-century. In particular it was argued that main way these developments have impacted upon the new Junior Cycle is by seeking to intensify the link between schooling and the economy. The main way the Irish State has attempted to achieve this objective is by embedding market ideals within the new Junior Cycle curriculum. In particular, it seeks to realize this ambition by focusing on the development of key areas of learning in schooling. To achieve this, the Irish State has recently published several policy initiatives with the explicit goal of increasing participation in specific forms of subject knowledge in schooling. The particular key areas of learning which it has targeted under this

reform are Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths [STEM], with an underlying emphasis on the role of ICT in the curriculum. This emphasis upon both subject and skill development for the labour market has been reinforced via a curricular framework of overarching structures which place increased level of accountability on both students and teachers in delivering the human capital necessary to drive the economy.

This chapter functioned to achieve several important objectives in relation to the overall aims of the thesis and the research questions therein. Firstly, it attempted to provide a general history of secondary education in Ireland. Secondly, it investigated specific changes to second-level learning in the context of key ideological developments within have occurred in Irish education the past three decades. Thirdly, it provided a chronological overview of changes to lower-second level curriculum, from the introduction of the Junior Certificate to its current format in the form of the New Junior Cycle. Lastly, the chapter concluded with a critique of the changes brought about under this reform from a critical perspective by highlighting the extent to which they coincided with shifts in economic and market demands. Having outlined the various changes and developments which have taken place in both Irish secondary education and the lower-second level curriculum over the past thirty years, this thesis now looks to explore what impact, if any, these shifts have had upon students' experiences of learning. It is for these reasons that a critically informed approach was used in the design and implementation of the empirical study detailed in the research methodology. The stimulus for this methodological approach was drawn from the tradition of critical theory and pedagogy as the theoretical framework outlined in next chapter will detail.

Chapter Four: Theoretical Framework

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present a theoretical framework for the empirical study which was conducted. The purpose of this framework is to outline the theoretical principles which underlie the field of inquiry upon which this research study was built. This framework will provide a structure for the epistemological; ontological and methodological approaches that were chosen for the research study. The chapter will begin with a short historical synopsis of the school of thought which acted as the foundation for this thesis as a whole. Next, the chapter will outline the key ideas that were produced by the theorists who belonged to this school of thought. Finally, building upon these ideas, the chapter will outline the theoretical approach devised by the main philosopher whose pedagogical vision informed the research study carried out as part of this thesis. The next section will begin with a brief overview of the origins beneath critical theory.

4.2 The Frankfurt School

This research was grounded upon the theoretical principles established by writers belonging to the Frankfurt School of critical theory. A large body of literature exists which explores the history of the Frankfurt School and the impact of its theorists' contributions upon Western culture (Jay, 1970; Tar, 1977; Jeffries, 2018). In order to establish a theoretical background, a selective account of the major events and works which shaped the development of this school will be provided in this section. Subsequent sections will attempt to explain key ideas within this school of thought and outline the ways in which these inform this thesis. It is of specific importance to note that the Frankfurt School played a significant role in creating the theoretical conditions for critical pedagogy to emerge. The relevance of this contribution will be explained later in the chapter, when the role of critical pedagogy in this thesis is detailed.

The Frankfurt school of thought began in 1923 as *The Institut für Sozialforschung* (Institute for Social Research) and formed part of the University of Frankfurt in Germany. In its first generation, this Institute comprised a number of academics in different fields of research, ranging from anthropology to pop culture, spanning a period of nearly six decades. Notably, this school was led by three central figures who published in the areas of sociology (Horkheimer); philosophy (Marcuse) and musicology (Adorno), respectively. It is important to note that this school arose from particular historical conditions which occurred during an important juncture in European history and originally served as an antithesis to many of the bourgeois class developments which occurred during this period. However, an important change occurred in the Institute's research outlook due to a series of ideological successes and failures in the Western world. As a result, both the Frankfurt School and its members were forced into exile for nearly a decade, first to Geneva and later, New York, during the Nazi-control of Germany. This shift caused members of the Institute to shift their focus from socio-economic sub-structures to capitalist superstructures within society (Jay, 1970). As Giroux (2003, pp.29-30) observes '…reacting to the rise of Facism and Nazism, on the one hand, and to the failure of orthodox Marxism on the other, the Frankfurt school had to refashion and rethink the meaning of domination and emancipation'. Consequently, members of the Institute, under the direction of Horkheimer, formed together with a new common purpose. In the words of the aforementioned (1931, p.33) '…Philosophers, sociologists, economists, historians, and psychologists must unite in a lasting working partnership…to do what all genuine researchers have done: namely, to pursue the greatest philosophical questions with the most refined methods'. This outlook was also reflected in the research agenda which Horkheimer (1972, p.44) set for the Institute, which prompted its members to question:

> What interconnections exists in definite social groups, in definite periods of time and in definite countries, between the position of the group in the economy, changes in the psychic structure of its membership and other relevant factors which condition and affect the group's thoughts and practices.

Despite operating under a singular rationale, it would be inaccurate to present the works of the Institute's members as a uniform body of thought, rather, '…close examination reveals that there are at best only critical theorists confronting a common problematic within more or less the same cultural tradition' (Arato and Gebhardt, 1978, p.22). Given this common concern, it is perhaps unsurprising, that the body of work published by theorists in this school became collectively known as 'critical theory'. In the words of Horkheimer (1972, p.246), this new form of theory was 'critical' in that it sought to achieve '…emancipation from slavery…acts as a liberating influence…and works to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of human beings'. Following on from these developments, the Frankfurt School continued until the death of its central members in the 1960s. The research conducted by these key figures was continued by a second generation of theorists in the Institute, most notably led by Habermas (1975; 1987; 2003) and Honneth (1991; 2009; 2016). The latter figures have separately attempted to remedy the perceived deficits of previous critical approaches to dominant power relations. The work of the Frankfurt theorists continues to provide contemporary researchers with an important critical perspective into issues in the world today. Their work provides the theoretical lens through which current problems such as ecological destruction and technological slavery may be understood and challenged (Biro, 2011; Fuchs, 2020). This short overview of the history and development of the Frankfurt School provides an indication as to how their work has shaped critical research, in general, as well as the significance which it continues to hold within research today. The next section will seek to expand upon the goal of critical theory and explain its relevance for educational researchers, in particular.

4.2.1 Critical Theory and Epistemology

There exists a number of key disputes exist pertaining to the nature of knowledge within the neo-Marxist tradition of critical theory. Most significantly, critical theorists posit that a distinction exists between two different kinds of reason, namely: *Verstand* (instrumental

reason) and *Vernunft* (dialectical reason). Such theorists claim that the former type of reasoning is an embodiment of the positivist paradigm which, in turn, functions as the epistemological tool of capitalism. While by contrast, they contend that the latter type of reasoning serves as the primary means through which the former may be challenged and overcome (Jay, 1973). Marcuse (1964, p.14) described dialectical thinking as '…the ability to abstract one's perception and thought from existing forms in order to form more general concepts'. Elsewhere, Bødker and Klokmose (2011, p.315) have defined dialectics as that which '…aims to understand things concretely in all their movement, change and interconnection, with their opposite and contradictory sides in unity'. Thus, critical theorists propose that dialectical reason functions as an epistemic catalyst against modes of thought which underpin dominant ideology in all of its structural manifestations.

From an epistemological standpoint, the work of the Frankfurt School is directed at a systematic critique of positivism, an approach to the philosophy of science which was first developed by Comte (1848) during the nineteenth century. Comte (1848) argued that the scientific method replaced metaphysics as a means of interpreting reality within the history of thought, thereby leading to the belief that the only authentic form of knowledge is scientific knowledge. By the end of the historical cultural movement referred to as the 'Enlightenment', positivism had become the dominant paradigm in the sciences. This school of thought continued to be championed throughout the twentieth century by contemporaries of the Frankfurt School, known as the 'Vienna Circle' (Bowie, 2006). This brand of logical positivism is best summarised, in the words of Hahn (1933, P.9), one of the main thinkers belonging to this group, who outlined the belief that '…the view that thought is a means of knowing more about the world than may be directly observed…seems to us entirely mysterious'. The aim of the Vienna Circle was to make philosophy scientific and rigorous through an emphasis on empirical verifiability in relation to claims about knowledge (Salmon, 1999). In contrast to this

position, members of the Frankfurt School argued that the focus on positivism, outlined by the Vienna Circle, represented the lowest point of Enlightenment thought (Feenberg, 2014). From this counter-perspective, reason had been stripped of its critical capacity and reduced to a fixed techno-rational process, which '…can be summarized as the optimum adaptation of means to ends, thinking as an energy-saving operation. It is a pragmatic instrument oriented to expedience, cold and sober' (Horkheimer, 1947, pp.26-27). Thus, for Horkheimer and his Frankfurt colleagues (Jeffries, 2015), reason had become instrumentalist in the sense that it was being employed to enforce man's control and use over nature. This form of thinking, they argued, resulted in the assertion of economic necessity over human freedom in the drive to understand the world and our place within it. This problematic is captured well in the words of Friedman (2003, p.33), who explains:

Reason, under the rule of positivism, stands in awe of the fact. Its function is simply to characterize the fact. Its task ends when it has affirmed the explicated the fact…under the rule of positivism, reason inevitably stops short of critique.

The Frankfurt School argued that the crisis in reason and the triumph of positivism was inextricably linked to the emergence of advanced capitalism in the West. They outlined the view that in advanced capitalist societies, economic advancement is interwoven with rationalization and technology. As Habermas (1970, p.150) observes, '…the quasi-autonomous progress of science and technology appears as an independent variable on which the most important single system variable, namely, economic growth, depends'. However, it is worth noting here that the rise of instrumental reason is not directly to blame for the '…frightening and evil aspects of technological civilization' (Horkheimer, 1973, p.66). Rather, it is the organization of production as capitalist production which '…threatens the spirit and today even the material survival of mankind, and not the technological progress itself' (Habermas, 1978, p.32). Consequently, the Frankfurt School members (Adorno, 1966; Horkheimer, 1967; Marcuse, 1964) set about examining ways in which the rise of this instrumentalist rationality

functions to undermine the development of critical rationality and by extension, social transformation. In other words, as society becomes increasingly rationalized under the dominant logic of capitalism, reason loses its critical faculty and becomes an instrument which supports the conditions of the existing society. As a result, reason as insight and critique becomes an antithesis of itself i.e. irrationality. The collapse of critical reason within society gives cause for concern about epistemic welfare of future generations as economic dominance gains increasing control over human nature and the world itself.

4.2.2 Critical Theory and Ontology

According to the tradition of critical theory, there are a number of important considerations which must be understood when it comes to the human experience of reality, dating back to the origin of this socio-philosophical tradition. Critical ontology is built upon the neo-Marxist belief that all social artefacts are shaped by a system of power relations, which is in turn governed by the interests of capitalism (Banfield, 2016). Building upon the ideas of Kant (1787), Marx (1867) argued that ontology must have three particular dimensions in order for it to be truly critical within a system of oppression, namely: the critique of political economy, dominant exploitation and ideology. This idea has, in turn, since been developed by several theorists (Foucault, 1961; Freire, 1972; Kincheloe, 2003) and has become a mainstay of contemporary critical theory and pedagogy. It is pertinent to note that critical ontology as a concept is comprised of more than twenty ideas which distinguish it from other forms of ontology (Kincheloe, 2003). Meyer (2011, p.221) has usefully organized these ideas into five different categories:

1. Meta-consciousness-expanding the capacity for self-reflection and the analysis of identity formation (1-4, 17, 18, 20)

2. Transcendence of ego-centrism- the difficult journey outward (6, 12, 22, 23)

3. The creation of integrated knowledge - understanding ourselves in relation to the way we rnake sense of the world, integrating personal knowledge into secular knowledge and vice versa (8, 10, 14, 15, 16)

4. Recognition of non-hierarchical difference-connecting intrapersonal development with an understanding of other individuals (5, 7, 9, 11, 13)

5. Developing self-reliance in the transcendence of authority dependence on fronting the culture of ethical and political passivity (19, 21, 22)

When used in conjunction, these ideas function to simultaneously reveal the role which dominant power plays, not just in the construction of our reality but also in the way our consciousness is shaped to perceive that reality (Habermas, 1973). By making us aware of the construction of our self-awareness, it becomes possible for us to recognize and question the dominant assumptions which have been institutionally embedded within our psyche. In this way, critical ontology functions as a praxiological device which assists people in recognizing the concealed nature of social hegemony and in so-doing imagine alternate ways of living.

4.2.3 Critical Theory Vs. Traditional Theory

The term 'critical theory' was originally coined by Horkheimer to act as a counterweight against traditional theory, in which the validity of knowledge is simply determined through its correspondence with empirical evidence (Kellner, 1990). By contrast, critical theory questions any form of knowledge which is derived from such conventional approaches to research. This tradition assumes the contrary position that theories of knowledge are contingent upon specific social situations, including those which are the product of scientific conditions (Giroux, 2003). For the Frankfurt theorists, both theory and subject matter are entwined together within a societal process that is frequently governed by dominant power and interest. For this reason,

they argue, scientific knowledge itself has been integrated into the societal apparatus which contributes to the forces of production that make modern industrial systems possible (Habermas, 1973).

For the Frankfurt School, the process of theorizing is fundamentally a dialectical process of thought and action which serves to reveal the contradictions inherent within traditional theory that claims knowledge as being independent and value free. As Marcuse (1960, p.9) explains, this type of thinking functions to:

> Break down the self-assurance and self-contentment of common sense, to undermine the sinister confidence in the power and language of the facts, to demonstrate that unfreedom is so much at the core of things that the development of their internal contradictions leads necessarily to qualitative change: the explosion and catastrophe of the established series of affairs.

Understood in this way, the dialectical notion of theory posits that scientific observation does not supersede critical reflection and understanding at an epistemological level. This is because the former operates from a theoretical framework which is in turn situated within a number of rules and conventions that give it meaning (Fuchs and Sandoval, 2014). This approach to inquiry requires individuals to recognize the implications which wider social influences have upon the development of theories and the knowledge which it gives rise to (Antonio, 1983). Thus, the idea of self-criticism is important for critical theorists who acknowledge the necessity of placing both oneself and one's beliefs as influencing factors in both the production and dissemination of knowledge (Giroux, 2001).

Critical theory is concerned with the radical transformation of existing social structure, in opposition to traditional theory, which plays a key role in maintaining existing social conditions (Giroux, 2003). Rather than supporting the positivist notion of neutrality, critical theory is explicitly emancipatory in its orientation and goals. Thus, Horkheimer (1972, p.245) states that:

It is not just a research hypothesis that shows its value in the ongoing business of men; it is an essential element in the historical effort to create a world that satisfies the needs and powers of men. However extensive the interaction between the critical theory and the special sciences, whose progress the theory must respect, and on which has for decades exercised a liberating and simulating influence, the theory never aims simply at an increase in knowledge as such. Its goal is man's emancipation from slavery.

This excerpt serves to underscore the fact that, for the Frankfurt School, all research and thought are tied to a specific interest in the development of a society which is equal for all. Habermas (1987) sought to further extend the ideas of the original Frankfurt School in his work on constitutive knowledge interests which he used to develop a more comprehensive form of critical theory. Habermas achieved this objective by constructing a notion of critical knowledge which did not solely rely upon the principles of either the natural sciences or the social sciences, but was rather built upon the idea of self-reflection and emancipation. In his own words, Habermas (1987, pp.7-8) described this work as '…a historically oriented attempt to reconstruct the prehistory of modern positivism with the systematic intention of analyzing the connections between knowledge and human interests'. Accordingly, for Habermas (1987) the positivist tradition of empirical sciences is founded upon an instrumental interest, which he claims arise from the human desire to exercise control over the world using laws and generalizations. Similarly, he argued (1987), that the social sciences are formulated around a number of principles which have been misconceived as the natural laws of society. Habermas proposed an alternative position which treats knowledge as an emancipatory pursuit which is manifest in the form of autonomous and responsible action. This position attempts to place both technical control (instrumentalism) and interpretive understanding (dialectic thought) in the service of real human needs, while at the same time freeing men and women from false dependence on the techno-rational principles which function to control them. These principles form the theoretical basis around which the empirical aspect of this research study is constructed. This rationale is indicated in the research design which seeks to assist participants in recognizing the mechanisms of control that surround their learning. It is hoped that this realization will kindle a sense of critical awareness within participants and prompt them to ask

further questions of the dominant logic which governs their social domain as they progress throughout their lives.

4.2.3 The Culture Industry

The Frankfurt School's analysis of culture is of especial importance for those seeking to understand the function of education and schooling in modern society. This analysis is significant because it explicates the extent to which mass media, religious institutions and economic interests represent different forms of ideological hegemony within schools, universities and other sites of learning. At the core of this theory proposed by the Frankfurt School members was an attempt to expose how positivist rationality manifested itself within the realm of culture. The Frankfurt theorists believed that culture, like everything, had become part of a manufactured process which they referred to as 'objectification'. Held (1980) observes that there was an agreement amongst the Institute members that both artistic and intellectual output were neither simply the reflection of specific class interests, nor the output of broader society as a whole. Supporting this point, he suggests (1980, p.80) '…they were interested in exploring the modes in which cultural phenomena interacted with, and sometimes determined, other social dimensions'. For Horkheimer and his colleagues, the cultural realm of society represented a form of control founded upon Enlightenment rationality in which the domination of nature and society operated behind a mask of technical progress and economic growth (Held, 1980). As a result, culture had become an industry in the sense that it not only produced goods and services, but also legitimated and embedded the logic of capitalism within public institutions. The Frankfurt School, defined this process as the 'reification of culture', which can be understood as meaning a '…definite social relation between men, appearing in the form of a 'relation between things' (Lukacs, 1971, p.83). Lukacs (p.83) elaborates upon this phenomenon by explaining that:

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> Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a phantom-objectivity, an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.

Building upon this excerpt, Lukacs (1971) argues that reification permeates all aspects of social life by taking on the appearance on things, thereby masking the dominant logic which lay beneath its façade. Thus, for Lukacs (p.92) and his Frankfurt colleagues, cultural reification functions as a social illusion which obscures our ability to accurately perceive the capitalist exchange process and therefore represents the '…central structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects'.

Building upon this problematic, a central concern for the Frankfurt School was to expose the ways in which this process of reification manifests itself within the totality of the public sphere. Linked to this point, Giroux (2003) notes that the term 'culture industry' was first coined by Adorno as a response to the issue of culture reification described above. Both adjectives within Adorno's conception of the culture industry served two distinct and important purposes. He employed the former in order to expose and challenge the idea that culture emerges organically from the masses within society. While the latter, he used to outline the way in which economic and political determinants function to control and direct the former toward the interests of social domination (Cook, 1996). Through this process, Adorno (1966) argued that the culture industry functioned to simultaneously distract mass society using a series of manufactured amusements; distractions and entertainments and in so doing, control it. According to Harvey (2005), this form of social diversion can be traced to the ethos which lies at the core of positivist rationality, namely, the structural division between work and play. This systemic approach to labour attempts to reduce the worker to the role of an economic commodity, whose consumption of culture becomes the only route through which they can escape from work. As Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) note:

> Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. It is sought after as an escape from the mechanized work process, and to recruit mechanization has such power over a man's leisure and

happiness and so profoundly determines the manufacture of amusement goods, that his experiences are after-images of the work process itself, The ostensible content is merely a faded background; what sinks in is an automatic succession of standardized operations.

This shift in the relationship between labour and leisure is succinctly characterized by Held (p.92) who observes that '…whereas once art had sought to fulfil the idealist dictum – purposiveness without purpose' – it was now bound by purposes set by the market – purposelessness for purposes'. The aim of the culture industry, therefore, is to produce goods which are both consumable and profitable. However, in the pursuit of this aim, people themselves are converted into objects or mechanisms which serve as the demand for the output which the industry functions to supply. Most significantly for the Frankfurt theorists, the deepening reification of the individual psyche in advanced capitalist societies represents a significant barrier to the development of revolutionary consciousness. Thus, for Giroux (2003, p.42), the power of the Frankfurt School's analysis of culture '…lies in the ideological fraud that constitutes this division of labour'. This hegemonic mask represents a barrier, too, for the critical pedagogue whose task it is to bring learners into critical reflection upon their world.

In relation to the thesis at hand, this aspect of critical theory bears particular relevance at an epistemological level. One of the primary concerns at the core of this thesis is the belief that knowledge itself has become an instrumental tool within the machine of capitalism i.e. the only knowledge worth gaining is that which contributes to the development of economic initiatives which sustain social inequalities and service the needs of those in power. In this way, learning forms part of a knowledge industry, as the Irish State determine which forms of knowledge are consumed and who benefits from this demand. Critical research around this topic has been conducted by post-Frankfurt thinkers such as Apple (1979); Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Giroux (1976). Under the capitalist model, education becomes redefined in terms of factory standards such as data outcomes; efficiency rates; product management and quality control (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). Freire (1997) captured the essence of this process in his description

of teachers as 'cultural workers' in the method of knowledge production in society. Teachers serve as agents of transmission in the diffusion and legitimization of social outlooks towards behavioural attitudes and norms in the wider society. These outlooks include the normalized belief that object of knowledge acquisition is to attain sufficient intellectual currency to enter and participate in the international labour market. In this way, the pursuit of knowledge is divorced from other liberal or progressive educational ideals, such as autotelic learning; citizenry; environmental protection or social mobility. Therefore, the privatization of knowledge raises important questions about the future of learning at all levels of public education as it prompts individuals to make choices about their future based around economic demand i.e. secure employment. Thus, while these choices may appear to be in the best interest of the individual, they are in fact detrimental to society at large.

4.2.4 The Frankfurt School and Education

Understood in its broadest sense, critical theory functions to highlight and challenge the various forms of structural oppression which are held in place through the ideological hegemony of capitalism. Critical theory seeks to challenge this system of exploitation by focusing upon issues of discrimination; race; marginalization and oppression. Torres (1989) highlights that critical theory has significant implications for the field of education, at both local and structural levels of importance. In relation to the former, he suggests that critical theory can be understood as a '…seminal framework to understand, curriculum and instruction, classroom practices and educational policies' (Torres, 1989, p.93). This is an important contribution, for it indicates, at a local level, what critical theory has to offer the study of education in contemporary society. While at a structural level, this perspective also holds important implications for wider organizational practices within education. On this point, it is worth quoting Torres at length:

> The aim of a political sociology of education is not only to understand educational policies and practices (as in the logic of the enlightenment) or to improve the epistemological, logical, and analytical

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perspectives of meta-theory, theory and empirical research (as in the logic of theorizing). A political sociology of education is not only an extension of a critique, drawing from the notion of negative philosophy, but also an invitation to change at macro level, contributing to improve the practice of policy makers, policy brokers and policy constituencies, and at micro level, contributing to improve both the cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes of teaching and learning (Torres, p.93).

Thus, viewed from a critical perspective, a very different vision for the role and practice of learning in contemporary society begins to emerge, which sharply contrasts with its current function within Western education and schooling. Within this vision, the overall concentration of all research and theorizing would not be the advancement of specific forms of knowledge, as is currently the case in the Republic of Ireland. Rather, the aim would be to re-direct all education and learning efforts toward liberation from the imposed ideological structures which are embedded within Western societies. This perspective stands in direct contrast to the solely economic function which is currently in place for education and schooling in an era that is dominated by the demands of capitalism. Critical education demands an approach that goes against the current framework which positions educational practice, and all schools therein, within the narrow role of economic instrumentalism. Within this neo-liberal framework, current policy makers in Ireland and throughout the West primarily see only an economic role for schooling in society, thereby preventing the transformative possibilities of learning from taking place at a social level. This context functions as the driving force behind the design of the empirical study which is later detailed in this chapter. Put simply, it is hoped that by making students aware of the economic function which schooling plays in their lives, they may begin to question and reclaim for themselves the role and purpose of learning.

Perhaps more than any movement in the twentieth century, it is the Frankfurt School that provided the most complete framework for understanding the nature and role of critical practice. Many of the major beliefs, ideas and themes that underpin critical pedagogy are to be found in the work of the Frankfurt theorists. Specifically, Giroux (1983, p.5) notes that '…what is central to the work of the Frankfurt School, is an examination of the degree to which the

logic of domination has been extended into the sphere of every day life, the public sphere and the mode of production itself'. Thus, a question is posed: to what extent have the ideological assumptions which underpin the hegemony of advanced capitalism become embedded within education and schooling? And, relatedly, what are the specific implications which face critical educators as a result? As Giroux (p.5) suggests, critical theory provides educators with the analytical tools to begin deconstructing such questions:

> What critical theory provides for educationalists is a mode of critique and a language of opposition that extends the concept of the political not only into mundane social relations but into the very sensibilities and needs that form the personality and psyche. The achievements of the critical theorists are their refusal to abandon the dialectic of agency and structure and their development of theoretical perspectives that treat seriously the claim that history can be changed, that the potential for radical transformation exists.

Giroux's contribution highlights the potential which critical theory possesses to develop a form of emancipatory education in which individuals are seen, not as passive or compliant but as active agents for change. Operating from this position, the possibility for education to play a more radical role in transforming the societies is opened up, through critical pedagogues who challenge their learners to make sense of their own realities, with the direct goal of creating a better world. The negative critique contained in the work of the Frankfurt School members also points to the positivist orientation of modern educational practices, which is indicated in the increasingly instrumental relationship that schools and other learning sites now hold in this era of globalisation and advanced capitalism. The pursuit of economic growth has become pervasive in discourses surrounding the direction and nature of public life, including the role and place of schooling within education. By extension, schooling and the practices therein have become blurred to the point that they are now indistinguishable from the aims and outcomes of national economic success. In the words of Horkheimer (1972, pp.26-27), schooling has become '…a pragmatic instrument oriented to expedience, cold and sober'.

The commodification of culture indicated in the Frankfurt School's analysis is mirrored in the commodification of schooling. At second level, students are now 'consumers', and both their

subject choices and career decisions are 'demand led'. However, the only route students are being led is to undertake subject choices and courses of study which are geared toward attracting foreign investment and boosting industry. The latest example of this discourse within education is centred around the term 'knowledge economy' (Coles, 2018) which openly promotes the idea that all learning should be directed toward the singular outcome of economic growth in the form of profit. Consequently, the implementation of free-market economics has come to dominate the language and practices surrounding schooling and its function within society. In Ireland, the current system of second level education provides little else but efficient feeder schools for the pursuit of a university education system which directly supports the economy. Children are sent to school 'to be educated' which has increasingly come to mean that they avail of this public service in order to gain the skills necessary to survive in the competitive jobs market. This amalgamation of market ideology and public education has resulted in a situation wherein those forms of subject learning which are readily monetizable (Commerce; STEM and Practical subjects) are increasingly valued over the those forms of subject learning which are not (Humanities), thereby rendering the latter expendable. In order to explore the extent to which these phenomena have become a normative part of Irish second-level schooling it was necessary to test the claims which have been made above. To achieve this task, a significant aspect of the empirical study which was carried out as part of this thesis examined students' experiences of curriculum reform. Questions concerning the purpose of schooling and learning will be explored from the perspective of pupils who have experienced this reform, which it has been argued, is designed to aid state rather than student ambitions.

The Frankfurt School members present us with important theoretical perspectives on modern culture and how we organize our society. Their critique of modern life opens up wider questions regarding the individual and society in relation to issues of domination and oppression. Under the specific guidance of Government and big business, very sophisticated mechanisms are

employed to ensure that the aims and outcomes of the public sphere are fundamentally aligned with those of the dominant ideology. It is argued here that the economic imperatives which underlie much of the public sphere today, including education, can only result in a deepened reification of the individual and society at large. Resulting from this situation, people are increasingly detached from what Freire (1972, p.43) terms our 'humanization', which he uses to describes our true ontological vocation as human beings. The loss of such agency comes at a large cost, namely, humanity loses its capacity to create culture and risk becoming silent subjects in the face of globalized oppression.

The work of the Frankfurt School indicates the structural importance which education and schooling play in our society and present serious questions for practitioners today. Their analysis questions popular commonsense notions that continue to pervade educational discourses, such as meritocracy and social mobility i.e. the idea that everyone will rise equally and harmoniously on a wave of economic and social success. Rather than fulfilling an emancipatory function which many teachers would like to think it serves, it is not difficult to posit that schooling as it presently stands, serves only to further sustain unequal relations within our society. This bleak outlook stands in contrast to the romanticized version of the teaching profession which is cultivated within society and further embedded in teacher training programmes. Despite this nihilistic perspective, I find agreement with those in the critical tradition who attempt to develop counter-hegemonic possibilities within educational practice. Theorists such as Giroux (1976), McLaren (1989) and Freire (1997) have used insights from the Frankfurt theorists to outline the potential of critical pedagogy to develop a more emancipatory vision of educational practice in the twenty first century. Such a project is not without its own challenges and problems, not least for the critical educator who finds themselves isolated among those who either fail to see or choose to ignore the inherent need for such a vision. Thus, the transformative power of individuals to affect change is a

fundamental theme within critical theory, which is also mirrored throughout the literature on critical pedagogy, as the next section will attempt to show.

4.3 Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is the approach to educational theory and practice, which attempts to assist people in both recognizing and overcoming the ideological conditions which control and suppress the potentiality of the human experience (Giroux, 2012). This approach to education is built upon the principles of critical theory (e.g. Adorno, 1973; Marcuse, 1972) which asserts that Western democracies attempt to sustain inherent inequalities through the cultivation of a dominant ideology, particularly in relation to race, class, and economic disparity (Horkheimer, 1972). Linked to this outlook, some of the major themes; ideas and beliefs that underpin critical pedagogy are found in the work of the Frankfurt theorists. On this point, Giroux (1983, p.5) is worth quoting at length,

> What critical theory provides for educationalists is a mode of critique and a language of opposition that extends the concept of the political not only into mundane social relations but into the very sensibilities and needs that form the personality and psyche. The achievements of the critical theorists are their refusal to abandon the dialectic of agency and structure and their development of theoretical perspectives that treat seriously the claim that history can be changed, that the potential for radical transformation exists.

This excerpt highlights the point that critical theory opens up an opportunity for education to play a more radical role in the transformation of society. Critical pedagogy positions itself in direct opposition to dominant models of education, which treat the person as a compliant and passive being, with little individual autonomy (Giroux, 1981; McLaren, 1986; Shor, 1992). By contrast, theorists within the critical tradition view individuals as beings with capacity to become active agents of change (Giroux, 2003). This outlook toward education underscores the emancipatory intent of a critical perspective on the role and purpose of education in society (Nikolakaki, 2012). Critical pedagogues believe that without intention, educators at all levels transmit knowledge which reflects the dominant logic of society, through their teaching. They view this problem as a direct consequence of the explicit and implicit beliefs which surround

teaching and are held in place through various ideological aspects, whether they be cultural; economic or political. These factors, they argue, prevent the possibility of value free curricula or learning in either education or schooling at a specific level (Giroux, 2015). Rather, such theorists argue that knowledge production is not separate from historical context and must be explored within the socio-political conditions which surround it (Dardar, 2017). Educators who are alert to the influences of dominant society may begin to ask pertinent questions of their own experiences, namely: '…How do I see my role as a teacher? Whose values does my teaching reflect? In whose interests do I serve?' (Apple, 1979, p.172). Through such reflection, critical pedagogues challenge themselves to look at their experiences through a critical lens, with the express intention of creating a better world for their students.

By design, critical pedagogy functions to question and challenge the everyday assumptions which form a key part of the logic that underpins public learning institutions (Giroux, 2012). In assuming this position, critical pedagogy performs an important role as an educational process which actively encourages students to question rather than conform to their educational experience (Nikolakaki, 2012). Practical applications of critical pedagogy were first conceived in the work of Freire (1972) who put forward the view that education is not a neutral endeavour and that it is the job of the critical educator to assist people in recognizing the imposed limitations of their political and economic conditions. Freire's contributions to critical pedagogy and their relevance for this thesis will be outlined in the succeeding sections.

4.3.1 Freire and Critical Pedagogy

This section of the thesis explores the specific vision of critical pedagogy outlined by Paulo Freire. The importance of Freire's work is evidenced by the fact that he remains one of the most cited thinkers in education today (Mayo, 2009). Notably, over the course of his lifetime, he completed significant work both with and on behalf of oppressed groups. Freire's

commitment to learning both about and alongside those whom he sought to assist is what demarcates his work from other liberalising approaches to education. In short, it can be said with a degree of certainty that Freire achieved a great level of understanding of his practice via his pedagogical activities in many different active contexts. For this reason, it is suggested here that the Freire's texts remain as relevant for educators today, as when they were first published. Moreover, the durability, impact and enduring hope outlined in Freire's contributions, support his inclusion as the principle theorist who informs this thesis. Discussing the principles which underpin Freire's educational approach will serve as an important prelude to the research design and methodology which will be outlined in the next chapter.

The aim of critical pedagogy for Freire is to achieve *conscientization*, or critical consciousness; a term which he coined to reflect the transformative possibilities of critical education (1972). Freire described conscientization as the way '…in which people, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociohistorical reality which shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality' (1996, p.27). Freire's vision of pedagogy deviates from conventional philosophies of education by attempting to develop the goal of education towards liberation. The antithetical rationale underpinning Freire's approach to learning is captured well in the words of Shor (1993, p.28):

> Traditional education orients students to conform, to accept inequality and their places in the status quo, to follow authority. Freirean critical education invites students to question the system they live in and the knowledge being offered them, to discuss what kind of future they want, including the right to elect authority and to remake the school and society they find.

Freire developed this approach in opposition to what he termed the 'banking concept' of education in which educational sites, such as schools, deposited information into the minds of students (1972). Freire argued that this outlook toward education is designed to treat students as passive recipients of information and thereby allow dominant ideologies and social structures to take place within their learning. In particular, he emphasized the controlling nature of this type of learning within education, which he defined it as '…a pedagogy that

transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world and inhibits creative power' (1972, p.76).

With respect to the classroom relationship between educators and learners, Freire highlighted the dichotomy which exists between teachers and students in the banking narrative of education. Freire (1972, p.72) described the banking process of learning as a method whereby '…knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those who know nothing'. In this way, he observed that through the banking process, the student is presumed to be ignorant without the existence of teacher. In his own words, he suggested that students are '…alienated like the slave in the Hegelian dialect, and accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher's existence, but, unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher' (Freire, p.72). In his rejection of this approach, Freire (1972) proposed a process of learning which humanizes the relationship between teachers and learners, who come together to name their world, so as to change it. This framework for change is underpinned by several key tenets which are integral to the overall pedagogical goal of assisting learners to recognize and challenge the imposed conditions which shape their realties, both educational and otherwise.

The succeeding sections will seek to unpack Freire's educational philosophy by focusing on the key aspects of his pedagogical framework, which he described in multiple publications over the course of his life (1970; 1972; 1978; 1985; 1996; 1997). These features of Freire's thought have been chosen for discussion as they both capture the spirit of critical educational philosophy and reflect the transformative nature of his pedagogical vision. In relation to the research project that was carried out as part of this thesis, these aspects of Freire's pedagogy formed the theoretical basis of research methodology which was chosen for the empirical study. Specifically, these tenets were used to inform who would be involved in the study and how the research itself would be conducted. Using these principles, it was decided that the research

would involve a small number of students as researchers and would be completed using a critical qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. These pedagogical principles were also used to directly inform how the principal researcher interacted with the student researchers throughout the research study from its beginning to its completion. Through this approach, it was hoped that assistant research participants would learn to uncover the connections between their learning and the norms and values of wider society. In this sense, the research which was carried out by research assistants represented a critical interrogation of their curriculum experience, in an effort to shed light on some of its concealed assumptions. In order to highlight the progression of Freire's methodological approach, each of the selected features of his pedagogical method will be discussed sequentially.

4.3.2 Dialogue

The first step in Freire's applied framework towards liberation with students is dialogue. Freire opposed traditional teacher and student roles, which he felt normalized hegemonic views about power, and therefore argued that such relationships should strive toward an approach to learning which is more balanced and shared (1972). He conceived of learning contexts in which '…a teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches; but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach' (1972, p.80). Dialogue, as it is understood in the Freirean sense, is not simply a method of communication between teachers and students, rather it is the means through which transformation occurs. In this way, the relationship between the teacher of the students and the students of the teacher is redefined and new terms emerge: 'teacher-student with students-teacher' (Freire, 2001, p.77). By re-imagining the traditional teacher-student relationship in this way, Freire called upon educators to employ a dialogical approach to learning with students, which would function to challenge the traditional power dynamics that govern mainstream learning (Freire, 1987). The transformative nature of this approach is characterized through its simultaneous attempt to both

empower learners by legitimating their experience of the world as teachers, while at the same time calling into question the conventional modes through which their learning takes place (Freire, 1989). By engaging with students in a process of shared inquiry, it becomes possible for teachers and students alike to investigate conditions in which their experiences take place, as the next section will discuss.

4.3.3 Generative Themes

Building upon the dialogical method, Freire next calls for teachers and students to identify generative themes within their experience or those of their peers. A generative theme can be understood as '…codifications of complex experiences which are charged with political significance and are likely to generate considerable discussion and analysis' (McLaren and Jandrić, 2018, p. 250). This process begins in dialogue between the teacher and students who begin a process of discovery by making observations about the concrete setting in which the students' experiences are shaped. By observing their context and peers in this way, students may then begin to identify the factors which take place within their learning context that inform their behaviour and beliefs (Freire, 1978). Once having completed this process, students can then begin to suggest generative themes which capture the concrete experience of the reality which they are describing. Drawing from these initial themes, the teacher can then begin a process of codification, in the form of generative words which are used to represent aspects of the learners' day to day situations (Freire, 1985). For example, if students suggested a theme of behaviour, the teacher may seek to characterize this experience using a related term, such as 'control' or 'power', which students could choose to accept or reject. From this word, students can then begin to carry out a process of de-codification. De-codification refers to the method through which students begin to deconstruct their own experiences by recognizing more clearly '…the previously unperceived meanings of the reality represented by that codification' (Heaney, 1997, p.12). In this way, students may begin to see that everyday experiences which

may have previously appeared as neutral occurrences, actually represent the assumptions and logic of a dominant ideology. This process equips students for the task of further critical thought as the next stage will outline.

4.3.4 Critical Thinking

In order to successfully develop upon the themes generated by students, Freire argued that they must learn to think critically about their experiences. Freire defined critical thinking as that which '…perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved' (1970, p.92). For Freire, the aim of critical thinking is to assist students in moving away from socially constructed perceptions about learning, towards a problem posing model in which they begin to critically question their educational realities (1989). By extension, this approach to critical thinking seeks to explore how the cultural narratives which take place in student learning are designed to serve the needs and interests of dominant ideologies within society. Accordingly, for Freire (1985, p.106) '…critical thinking starts from perceiving the root causes of one's place in society – the socioeconomic, political, cultural, and historical context of our personal lives'. By adopting individual reality as a starting point, Freire's notion of critical thinking encourages students to become more critically aware of social and political factors govern their own day to day existence (Souto-Manning, 2010). By learning to think about individual and collective experiences in this way, students become neatly positioned to question the factors that give rise to their circumstances, as the next section will detail.

4.3.5 Problem Posing Education

For Freire, the educators' role is to pose problems about the codified experiences of learners in order to help them to gain an increasingly critical view of their own reality. Through this

process students learn not only how to think about their individual and collective situations, but also how to question them. For this reason, a key aspect of Freire's liberatory framework is the development of problem posing, or critical questioning within learning. Such an approach to questioning is aimed at assisting the learner to see not only how dominant ideologies impact upon society at large but also how their individual circumstances are shaped by that ideology (1989). The goal of this approach is to assist students in developing the ability to perceive the world critically, so that they may come to see '…they way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves' (2001, p. 83). One of the most important ways in which this approach is achieved is by encouraging students to call into question the discourses which they have received as part of their formal education or learning experience. In this sense, '…the students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher' (1972, p.81). By learning to recognize the disparities between dominant discourses and actuality, students can begin to reclaim the process of learning for themselves. In the words of Freire, through (1970, p.83) '…problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves'. By learning to question their everyday experiences, students become well positioned to recognize that reality is not a fixed process, but rather is something which can be influenced and transformed, as the next section will explain.

4.3.6 Praxis

Following on from the above stages, the final step in Freire's liberatory framework is praxis. Understood in a traditional sense, praxis can be simply defined as 'action informed by theory' (Eaton and Smith, 2010, p.3). Building upon this concept, Freire (1970, p.36) extended the meaning of the term to include a transformative outlook, defining it as '…reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it'. In this way, Freire (1970) sought to include praxis as a fundamental aspect of his pedagogy, by redefining it as a liberating process in which people

could learn to explore and change their own historical conditions. By incorporating this concept within his vision of pedagogy, Freire attempted to assist learners to create the conditions in which they could begin to re-make the world around them. Freire (p.154) expressed this belief in his suggestion that '…qualitative change in the perception of the world can only be achieved in its praxis'. This final stage of Freire's framework is, therefore, is guided by the belief that theoretical principles must be applied within the context of social reality, in order to bring about change in the world (1970). In this way, Freirean pedagogy as a whole seeks to assist students in recognizing the dominant ideological assumptions which underpin their lives and equipping them with the ability to change such conditions both for themselves and others.

4.3.7 Freire and the Classroom

The importance of Freire's work continues hold significant purchase on academic discourse, which is indicated by the fact that he remains one of the most important thinkers in education today (Giroux, 2010). Freire was clear in his belief that educators should not attempt to replicate his work but rather that it ought to be reapplied in both different ways and in different contexts. In his own words (1997, p.308) '…the progressive educator must always be moving out on his or her own, continually reinventing me and reinventing what it means to be democratic in his or her own specific cultural and historical context'. Consequently, efforts to apply Freire's teachings often take different forms and seek to avoid '…adulterating his work by reducing it to a method or technique' (Mayo, 2004, p. 5). Moreover, there exists a body of literature which details the numerous ways in which educators have attempted to adapt Freire's methods in the mainstream classroom and beyond (Shor, 1987; Grollios, 2009; Souto-Manning, 2010). However, given that Freire's work primarily centred around teaching literacy to adult peasants, it is perhaps unsurprising that most of the attempts to apply his teachings, both in Ireland and abroad, have taken place in the context of adult education and educational disadvantage.

Critical pedagogues who are serious in their commitment to the development of emancipatory education often seek to form their own response to the issues facing learners in their own unique setting. Therefore, the reinvention of Freire remains the overarching task facing any educator who sees value in his work. Through considerable research on Freire and related studies which have attempted to implement Freirean approaches within academic research, a novel approach to the application of his pedagogical principles was found. It was observed that relatively few attempts have been made to incorporate Freire's thought into studies within the context of schooling and fewer still have tried to include students in the process, beyond the role of study participant. Following this line of thought, a natural approach to reinventing Freire became apparent to me as a classroom practitioner, which I thought could be developed in the form of a justifiable research study. As later sections will detail, this study involved a small number of students working as assistant researchers, alongside the principal investigator. In keeping with Freire's pedagogical principles, this study took place in a secondary school, where the researcher held a pre-existing relationship with students. These familiar elements provided the necessary conditions for the researcher to incorporate Freire's approach to learning with students in an authentic fashion. However, before attempting to implement a Freirean approach, it was important for the researcher to ask themselves '…am I fully engaged with my students in helping them to develop a critical understanding of their world? Or am I imposing *my* worldview on them?' (Freire, 1985, p.86). These questions and others acted as an important point of reflection for the researcher throughout the study process to ensure that participants engaged in an authentic learning experience that was true to the principles outlined above. In doing so, the study which was conducted as part of this thesis represented a modest contribution to the perceived gap within the literature surrounding this area.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a clear outline of the theoretical principles that have been used to inform this thesis from the outset. This is to say that the philosophical outlooks described by the Frankfurt School were at the core of the ideological critique which took place in earlier chapters. This chapter neatly showed how the learning which takes in contemporary schooling exists within an economic framework of exploitation. It achieved this by showing how knowledge has been commodified as a concept within curriculum and now operates as a component within the wider 'culture industry'. This critique of ideology resulted in the justification for further inquiry in the form of an empirical research study. This critical rationale directly informed the research position and values that were adopted by the researcher when approaching the research study. While the research design and methodology used in this study sought to build upon Freire's pedagogy by developing a form of critical inquiry which would make curricular ideology more visible to students. The main way the thesis sought to realize this critical approach was by including students as assistant researchers in a school-based empirical study. The aim of this study was to work alongside assistant researchers in exploring the effects of market-driven ideology upon their peers' experiences of learning under curriculum reform. Complete details of the steps taken to design and implement this research study will be outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Research Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin to address the remaining thesis research questions by explaining the methodology and methods which were chosen for this study. As this research involved working with students, the chapter will refer to some of the literature in the areas of the capture,

transcription, and analysis of classroom discourse from the perspective of insider research. The chapter will begin by outlining the research paradigm which informed the methodological approach selected for this study. This overview will be followed by an exact account of the step-by-step approach that was used to implement this method. In order, the specific areas that will be covered in the chapter are:

- The research paradigm that the thesis used;
- The approach and rationalisation behind data collection;
- The research site and its relation to the researcher as an insider;
- The data collection itself and the involvement of student-researchers;
- The approach taken to transcribing the data and some of the issues in completing this task;
- The approach taken to analyse the data;
- The validity of the data collected;
- The steps which were taken to gain ethical approval for the research study.

At all times during this research, the *Research Ethics* document from the University of Reading served as a guide for the research processes listed above. It should be noted here that the names of all people and locations contained within this and subsequent chapters were changed in order to protect the identities of those involved in the study. The overall purpose of this chapter is to provide an account of the steps which were taken to organize, plan and implement the empirical research study which was used to answer the remaining research questions which the thesis sought to answer.

5.2 Research Paradigm

In the context of this thesis, a paradigm can be understood as '…a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality' (Göktürk, 2016, p. 2). Paradigms are characterized by the ontological and epistemological positions assumed by the researcher

in relation to subject under study and how these outlooks are made apparent through the choice of research methodology (Scotland, 2012). While a variety of different methodological approaches are used within academic research, it is generally accepted that these approaches fall within two main but competing models of understanding: quantitative and qualitative.

5.2.1 Ontological Position

Traditionally understood, ontology refers to human beliefs about the nature of reality; how these beliefs are formed and the ways in which these beliefs impact upon the individual interpretations of the world (Scotland, 2012). Ontological perspectives are of particular importance within academic research, as they strongly inform the way in which the researcher positions themselves in relation to a subject under study (Creswell, 2014).

Drawing upon the position outlined in the theoretical framework, practitioners who view the world through the lens of critical ontology openly reject any hegemonic assumptions that hold a fixed control over public life and aspire to change them. Thus, what distinguishes this approach from traditional forms of ontology is its express focus on the process of bringing about social transformation through 'praxis' or theory based action (Renault, 2015). Taking this idea and applying it to the concept of schooling, Meyer (p.224) suggests that critical ontology is central to the process of discovery and overcoming curricular hegemony because it explicates the '…meta-conscious changes in how one understands teaching and learning and the way teachers and students make sense of themselves and their world'. It is for these reasons that critical ontology was selected as the most appropriate position to underpin the thesis as a whole. This outlook played an important role in determining the core focus of the research study i.e. how the hegemonic values of capitalism become entrenched within students' perceptions of learning in schooling. By assuming this stance, the researcher sought to realize

the praxiological stage of critical ontology through a joint process of co-operative inquiry with students who were live participants within this institutional framework.

5.2.2 Epistemological Position

Epistemology, is a word that is derived from the ancient Greek 'epistēmē' concerning with the human ability to know and its relation to theories of knowledge (Gerson, 2009). Epistemology looks at how knowledge is developed, attained and transferred (Scotland, 2012). This concept is therefore concerned with how we know something and whether we form part of that knowledge or are external to it.

The epistemological tradition underpinning this research study was informed by the neo-Marxist tradition of critical theory. This position stands in direct opposition to the scientific epistemology of 'positivism' which argues that knowledge is a neutral occurrence that takes place in a value-free domain. Rather, neo-Marxists argue that the positivist understanding of knowledge takes place within a system of capital relations and does not represent an objective attempt to seek truth (Fuchs, 2007). As such, those who hold a critical perspective towards epistemology assert that knowledge does not exist *ex nihilo* and is not, therefore, value free. For this reason, cultivating a critical awareness of dominant logic within education is of paramount importance to critical educators across the spectrum of learning. Doing so requires a committed refusal to allow learning to become another economic commodity within the chain of national output. It requires us to ask of ourselves and our students, beyond financial security, why do we learn? The failure to do so at a fundamental level risks the collapse of epistemophily (the human desire to learn) into epistemicide (the death of knowledge). This concern for the future of learning formed a key part of the rationale behind this thesis, which aims to ignite a sense of pedagogical hope for critical educators and learners alike. By adopting this epistemic premise, the research study conducted as part of this thesis sought to expose the contradictions

which exist between the espoused functions of learning within schooling and increasingly narrow purpose which it has come to serve within the Irish context. In doing so, the research aimed to identify how the 'lifeworld' of students was 'colonized' by hegemonic interests of capitalist learning (Habermas, 1981).

5.2.3 Methodology

Methodology is the approach used to investigate and collect the intended knowledge by exploring '…why, what, from where, when, how the data are gathered and analyzed' (Scotland, 2012, p. 9). Methodology therefore, refers to how we set about finding out answers to a question.

5.2.4 Critical Methodology

Critical methodology refers to research approaches which are built upon the neo-Marxist tradition of critical theory. As previously established, this tradition is centred around the philosophical pursuit of freedom from dominant ideological discourses, through the active recognition and questioning of social structures (Lodh, 1996). Drawing upon this tradition, critical approaches to research are informed by critical pedagogy, the dimension of critical theory which is expressly concerned with education. Critical pedagogy seeks to openly challenge those forms of learning which generate unequal conditions amongst individuals within society in the interest of capitalism (Kellner, 2001). In recent years, critical approaches to action research have experienced a resurgence within education, where they has been used to challenge social inequalities within schooling and beyond (Strunk and Betties, 2019). The rationale behind this mode of inquiry is the belief that any attempt at social change must involve the active participation of those who are most affected (Kincheloe, J., McLaren, P. Steinberg, S. and Monzo, L., 2017). This type of investigation places a particular emphasis on the role of both students and teachers as researchers of their own contexts and how they relate to the

broader dimensions of society (Steinberg, 2014). For example, Kincheloe (2012) describes how this methodology was implemented in a British action research project, where it was used to assist students in exploring how different assumptions shape teachers' curricular interactions with students. Elsewhere, Horn (2015) employed this approach to develop a critical line of inquiry with his students, so that they could explore both the empowering and disempowering aspects of their daily school lives. Such inquiry calls into question the validity of outsider research in exploring the conditions and experiences of minority groups or generational gaps. As a research participant in one such study puts it: 'It's not your guys' story, you guys didn't live in it. I'm not you … it's like you're trying to speak your opinion on a road you never walked before' (Martin, 2019, p.297). It was with this context in mind that the research design behind the empirical study in this thesis was developed.

Critical approaches to education are not rare within the Republic of Ireland, where they have been widely used to challenge the causal factors which create societal disadvantage, particularly amongst minority groups (Downes and Gilligan, 2007). However, all known research efforts involving critical methodology have taken place outside the context of secondary education and have involved adult research participants, rather than post-primary students. Similarly, all known qualitative studies that have involved students in Irish secondary education since the introduction of the new Junior Cycle have exclusively employed traditional methods such as questionnaires, interviews and focus groups (NCCA, 2011; Flynn, 2013; 2017; Lanelli & Smyth, 2017). It is important to acknowledge that a number of studies were identified which related to some of the main research themes that were explored in this thesis. For example, research that was completed by King (2017) provided a contextual analysis of the new Junior Cycle curriculum reform. Furthermore, a study was completed by Horgan (2017) which involved co-operative inquiry with post-primary students but did not include their experiences of schooling or curriculum reform. Similarly, a study was completed by Doyle

(2017) which involved co-operative inquiry with student carers outside of the school context. Additionally, a study was completed by Curran (2019) which explored the impact of a career interest instrument with Transition Year students. Lastly, studies were also found which included co-operative learning with students (Alraddadi, 2020) and teachers' perceptions of lower secondary curriculum reform (Darmody, Lysaght and O'Leary, 2020). However, it is important to highlight that the none of foregoing studies used co-operative inquiry as a research methodology with students to explore the New Junior Cycle curriculum reform, nor did they assume a critical position against this reform.

5.2.5 Quantitative Paradigm

The quantitative paradigm is built upon the principles of positivism which hold that knowledge can only be gained objectively and it therefore rejects value-based interpretations of reality (Pring, 2014). Researchers in this tradition employ a deductive approach in their quest for understanding. This approach, generally referred to as the 'scientific method', involves the following stages: theory/hypothesis; data collection; findings; hypothesis confirmed or rejected and revision of theory (Bryman, 2012; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

In keeping with the positional viewpoints outlined so far, it is argued that there are several limitations when it comes to the quantitative paradigm in academic research. Namely, it is built upon the Cartesian-Newtonian world view which holds mechanistic assumptions about the concept of truth and the processes via which it may eventually be arrived at (Kincheloe, 1998). This paradigm openly excludes any epistemological claims which do not fall within the pre-determined parameters which it has placed around knowledge. By contrast, those who uphold a critical position assert that the quantitative paradigm, while valid, does not represent a complete lens through which the human experience can be viewed or understood.

5.2.6 Qualitative Paradigm

The qualitative paradigm is based upon the ideas of interpretivism which argue that knowledge can only be attained using the insight which is gained through the human experience (Creswell, 2018). For this reason, the qualitative paradigm rejects positivist understandings of reality which attempt to objectively generalize and quantify the subjective human experience. This approach, begins with an inductive approach in its effort to generate observations/findings before developing a theory or hypothesis (David & Sutton, 2011).

In line with the stated research position, the research conducted as part of this thesis was achieved through the lens of a qualitative paradigm. This paradigm was chosen because it is grounded on the fundamental principle that knowledge is a process, rather than a body of objective information. Proponents of this paradigm reject the claim that knowledge is objective and contend that all quantitative research takes place within a qualitative domain. This axiom corresponds with the critical belief that knowledge is relative to its historical context and is frequently tied to the dominant mode of production within that context. As a result, proponents of the critical tradition often employ a qualitative lens in their attempt to challenge inequalities which they perceive to exist in any given current state of affairs.

5.2.7 Critical Paradigm

In keeping with good educational practice, this researcher's philosophical position is clearly stated (BERA, 2003). In this thesis, the researcher adopted a critical stance towards education, and the process and practice of educational research. The term 'critical' here can be understood to mean a position that rejects paradigms which claim that the process of research is objective

or value free. This paradigm is similarly opposed to research outlooks which fail to recognize the subjective nature of knowledge production and the power relations which underpin the collection of data. This paradigm is drawn from the neo-Marxist tradition of critical theory and its educational diminutive, critical pedagogy. Exponents of this position (Marcuse, 1965; Habermas, 1970; Freire, 1972) viewed schooling as an inorganic component within a broader social system of capital relations and sought to challenge the interests which these public learning sites serve. Thus, researchers who view education through a critical lens attempt to explore and question the hegemonic assumptions underpinning the instruction which takes place in social structures such as schools. In this way, the critical perspective functions in direct opposition to the mainstream rationale used to guide and shape all aspects of public life, generally, and institutions within, specifically. By extension, it is recognized that research is not a neutral undertaking and researchers themselves should strive to remain aware of their own individual assumptions when conducting inquiry. Failure to acknowledge these assumptions could result in a number of potential ethical issues when it comes to research involving students in schooling. For example, a natural concern may be that students could be exposed to ideologically charged perspectives or feel pressured to adopt the same political views and conclusions as the researcher. For this reason, a number of measures were be included in the research design behind the proposed empirical study to ensure that it could be carried out in such a way that students could participate as researchers, without necessarily adhering to its ideological underpinnings. In view of the foregoing concerns, it is important to note that although the research methods may be inspired by a particular ideological position, it is not the goal of this study to persuade the research participants to adopt this ideology or any related political outlooks. Furthermore, the aforementioned concerns are both recognized and shared by the researcher, given the power relations which exist in their capacity as a classroom

practitioner and the formative age of those students who are likely to be involved in the proposed study outlined in the subsequent sections.

5.3 Research Design

The term 'research design' refers to the framework of methods and techniques chosen by the researcher to address their research problems. This design specifies the procedures chosen to gather and analyze the information needed to solve these problems (Creswell, 2014).

5.3.1 Ethnography

While there are numerous approaches to qualitative research, ethnography remains one of the most common ways in which people seek to understand the lives of others (Hammersley, 2006). This approach is traditionally characterized by several distinct stages which lend validity to the data gathering process (Hogan et al, 2009). For example, the researcher must situate themselves within the context of their study for an extended period of observation to understand the normal routines of their participants. Ethnographic researchers may also seek to establish a connection with participants through engagement during daily customs. Importantly, ethnographic data must be gathered within the normal everyday pattern of the subjects' lives, to ensure that there are no irregularities which disturb the validity of the data collection process (McNiff, 2014).

5.3.2 Critical Ethnography

Critical ethnography is the research methodology chosen for carrying out this study. It is an approach in qualitative research that values the ways in which indigenous populations interpret their own way of life. This study attempts to ensure that '…the subjects of investigation are the actual creators of the data and knowledge, which can only be accessed through their interpretation of their social conditions' (Nabudere, 2002, pp.19-20). For guidance on situating and conducting a critical research project, key literature on critical ethnography was consulted (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Quantz, 1992; Simon & Dippo, 1988; Thomas, 1993). This

approach is characterized by its emphasis on observation, data triangulation and focus group discussions. It should be noted here that critical ethnography, as it is traditionally employed, includes research on and with people who are oppressed (Carspecken, 1992). However, this approach has also been adapted to contexts and situations involving dominant or fixed ideological conditions. Therefore, it is important to clarify that for the purpose of the empirical study, a critical ethnographic approach was used to explore the experiences of those who live under imposed, rather than oppressive circumstances.

While ethnography usually describes how things are, critical ethnography is more concerned with why things are that way and focuses on the bringing about conditions for change in aspects of the issue under investigation (Cohen et al, 2011). This approach to research is built upon the neo-Marxist tradition of critical theory which holds the position that Western democracies cultivate inherent inequality while operating under a guise of neutrality. Proponents of the critical tradition (Adorno, 1973; Marcuse, 1972) argue that reason itself is structured according to the dictates of capital and that this fundamental bias needs to be exposed within the logic of all social structures. By extension, public educational sites that operate within this context are shaped by dominant ideological thinking and are not therefore neutral domains. It is for these reasons, that the research approach chosen for this study was shaped by a political dimension that seeks to directly challenge the principles upon which the chosen site of research is formed. This methodology was used in an effort to create critical awareness among students of the ideological structures which shape their learning. In this way, the study was influenced by both the tradition of critical theory in general and the critical pedagogical teachings of Freire in particular.

The selection of critical ethnography as the planned choice of research methodology for this thesis reflected an open intention not just to explore how power functions in the daily realities of people but also to change it (Carspecken, 1996). Gunzenhauser (2004) highlights that this

approach usually entails four specific promises on the part of the researcher: giving voice, uncovering power, identifying agency and connecting analysis to cultural critique. Moreover, Horner (2002, p.580) notes that this approach rejects the 'myth of the lone ethnographer', in favour of a research practice that recognises '..the researchers' partiality, the effects of their work on the lives of those at the research site, and the rights of participants to have a say, and a hand, in the nature of the work'. By assuming this stance, the critically positioned researcher attempts to assist people in both identifying and challenging the patterns of social power and domination which shape their existence (Lodh, 1996).

There are five value orientations which inform critical ethnography as a research methodology (Carspecken, 1996). The first is a criticism of a given society or social structure. This premise asserts that there are many issues in a society which are not favourable for the good of all. Secondly, researchers who use this approach next seek to identify who the most privileged groups are in a given society. Thirdly, an attempt is made to identify how the inequality experienced by other individuals or groups is created by dominant ideologies in the same context. The fourth orientation examines the different ways in which repressive beliefs operate in society and function to maintain a culture of inequality. Finally, critical researchers challenge mainstream research methodologies which support, rather than question, those ideologies which sustain dominant cultural norms. As a result, researchers in the critical tradition view it as their responsibility to explicate those ideological structures which permeate adverse social conditions and act to change them. The next section will discuss the positional difference which existed between the principal researcher and the five students that were invited to participate as assistant researchers in the empirical study.

5.4 Data Collection

Data collection is the process by which specific information is gathered in order to assist the researcher in the task of answering those questions which they have deemed to be most relevant

to their particular interests (Mack et al, 2011). The collection of data is inextricably tied to the questions which a research study seeks to answer. For this reason, research questions form the focus of a study and serve as a clear guide from which all other aspects of the research follow. It has been suggested that good research can be equated with well-developed research questions (Haynes et al., 2006). This remainder of this study will be guided by the following research questions:

- What are students' perceptions of learning under recent curriculum reform?
- Could an applied Freirean approach to pedagogic inquiry assist students in recognizing any assumptions or biases which underpin learning in schooling?

These research questions will serve as the focal point around which the remainder of the thesis is orientated. For this reason, the final research question held a direct bearing on the way in which data was both collected and analysed.

5.4.1 Questionnaire Design

Research methods form a crucial part of all empirical study processes as they represent the direct means through which the investigator seeks to obtain the exact data which is required to address their specific inquiries (Aspers, 2019). Researchers must therefore be careful to ensure that the tools which they use for inquiry correspond closely with possible with the data that they hope to acquire (Leech, 2007). According to (Kellet, 2004), questionnaires are one of the most effective ways to gain direct responses from children and for this reason, they continue to function as an established tool for inquiry within studies that involve students in schooling. Thus, for the purpose of this empirical study, the researcher opted to develop a questionnaire as their chosen method of data collection. In order to develop this questionnaire, the researcher first consulted the key literature surrounding research design with children (Kincheloe, 1998; Alderson, 2005; Kellet, 2010). This literature included guidance on document layout and

presentation for young people (Tisdall et al, 2008), the use of child friendly language (Van Manen, 2016) and mixed question styles for students (Bell, 2007). Different question styles were included in the questionnaire design to ensure that the questionnaire catered for a wide range of learning abilities (Mathers, 2007). The mixed range of question types chosen for this questionnaire also functioned as an important research tool in attempting to maximise the response quality provided by the study participants (DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz, 2017). Once the layout and styles had been established, the researcher developed questions which were specific to the empirical study by modelling them against previous studies which involved curriculum inquiry with students (OECD, 2004; Smyth, 2006). The researcher also located specific literature on the development of critical research and question development with students (Kincheloe, 1998). This text provided key direction on how to evoke a sense of critical awareness within students and prompt them to ask challenging questions of their own by way of codification, de-codification and dialogue.

Drawing upon this literature, a questionnaire was designed by the principal researcher which sought to elicit participants' views about learning in general and their experiences of learning over the three-year period in which they completed the Junior Cycle. To achieve this goal, a list of questions was devised to elicit the requisite data needed to address the research question which the study hoped to answer i.e. students' perceptions of curriculum reform. In total, the questionnaire comprised forty questions which ranged from highly general inquiries about learning in general to highly specific questions about experiences of schooling. As a whole, the questionnaire centred around ten key questions, which were deemed most likely to generate the data required to answer the research question. These questions were divisible into two categories: implicit questions about learning in general and explicit questions about experiences of learning in school. It was not assumed that the responses to these questions would represent mutually exclusive views, rather, it was expected that the former were to at

least some extent informed and shaped by the latter. The key questions included on the questionnaire may be viewed in the appendices at the end of the thesis [Appendix E].

This questionnaire was approved by both the principal researcher's supervisors and the ethics committee at the University of Reading. For assurance purposes, the questionnaire was piloted by three teachers and a Senior Cycle student in the school. The purpose of this pilot was to ensure that the language contained within the questionnaire was student friendly and that questions were framed in a neutral way. The purpose of this teacher/student pilot was to account for national and regional perspectives on the grammar; wording and meaning of various questions included in the questionnaire, as viewed from both the perspectives of teachers and a student. Furthermore, the assistant researchers involved in the research aspect of this study were also afforded the opportunity to review this questionnaire and suggest changes to the document, once they themselves had completed it as part of their induction to the project. This version of the questionnaire is the same copy that was distributed to the entire pool of research participants discussed in the last chapter. This questionnaire was issued to all participants in the project, subject only to minor changes which were made at the suggestion of the student researchers and those mentioned above. These changes related to the layout of the questionnaire; synonyms for certain words and the inclusion of further options on multiple choice questions. As per the research timeline [Appendix D], all five students completed the questionnaire under the supervision of the principal researcher in their own designated classroom space, in order to ensure validity. This act of inclusion represented the formal point of change at which these students transitioned from being passive subjects of the study, to active student researchers within the project. The points of change outlined above were highlighted in the documents submitted as part of original application for ethical approval.

Once consent forms had been collected from the student researchers, they were afforded a seven-day period of grace, during which they could change their minds about participating in

the project. After this time had elapsed, the commitment to the project was confirmed with the student researchers once further, before any further action was taken in the study. These students were made aware that their participation as researchers would form part of data collected and that they themselves were a key part of the research focus. As such, it was clearly explained to the students that they would be both research participants, as well as researchers themselves. Subsequent to their agreement, the students were invited to commence their role as participants by completing a questionnaire which had been devised for the project [Appendix D].

5.4.2 Interview Design

The interview approaches chosen for this research project were primarily drawn from Kellet's (2005) text, which focuses specifically on conducting interviews with children in an educational context. This text describes a process of interviewing which is dialogically-based and focuses upon the elicitation of emic perspectives which allow the voice of the child to be heard. The text provides specific guidance on interview approach, question development, tone usage and also includes a number of sample interviews for researchers to draw understanding from. Accordingly, this text was chosen as the primary source from which the researcher developed their interview approach. In addition to this text, the researcher also consulted a further body of literature which exists around the area of interviewing children in the context of empirical research (Merrill and West, 2009; Morrison and Flegel, 2016; O'Reilly and Dogra, 2016; Seidman, 2019). All questions that were asked in the student interviews were drawn from the questionnaire described in the previous section. For example, the students were asked 'which subjects do you think are the most professionally employable?' and 'which subjects are you most likely to choose for the Leaving Certificate?' The purpose of this approach to

questioning was to ensure conformity in the data gathered from both the student researchers and their peers. Likewise, this interview approach also acted as a point of reference when assessing the extent to which the student researchers' views had or had not changed upon completion of the empirical study. The questionnaire from which these queries were drawn may be viewed in the appendices of this thesis [Appendix D].

5.4.3 Student Positionality

It was anticipated prior to the empirical study that the ontological positionality of the principal researcher would likely differ from the stances held by the student researchers that were invited to participate in the research. It was also recognized that different positional outlooks could exist between the student researchers themselves. Given that the principal researcher was approached the project from a critical standpoint, it was deemed unlikely that this would also be the outlook of the student researchers at the beginning of the research study. Rather, it was assumed that the student researchers would likely uphold an exploratory attitude upon commencing their role in the project. As the findings in chapter six will show, this expectation proved to be correct. However, it was hoped that as the student researchers began to examine the everyday rules and structures which shape the behaviour of their peers, they would learn to recognize that a pre-determined rationale underpinned the curricular aspects of their own individual experiences. The ontological basis of this approach was outlined by Kincheloe (1998, p.3) who noted that:

> As student researchers pursue such a reflective approach to their everyday experiences, they gain the ability to explore the hidden forces that have shaped their lives. Such students gain the ability to awaken themselves from a mainstream dream with its unexamined landscape of knowledge and consciousness construction. In their newly awakened state, critical student researchers begin to see schools as human creation with meanings and possibilities lurking beneath the surface.

Thus, as this excerpt suggests, the critical qualitative approach underpinning the research methodology accounted for the likelihood that students in school frequently possess an outlook which either favours, or is at best, neutral towards their learning environment. Consequently,

the aim of this research process was to present the student researchers with the opportunity to embark upon a journey of discovery about their own learning. While it could not be guaranteed that the student researchers would necessarily conclude the project with the same outlook as the principal researcher, it was hoped that they would learn to question their own original assumptions.

5.4.4 Where, why and who?

The proposed research study took place in the setting of a single post-primary school. It was expected that the data gathered for this study would be collected over a four-month period. At the time of research application, the researcher was employed in a secondary school which was likely to grant approval for this research study to be conducted. As with the majority of post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland (more than 90%), this site was underpinned by a faith ethos, consisted of a mixed body of students and upheld a traditional approach to curriculum implementation. Therefore, this site was ideal for research and data collection because it represented a standard example of a national post-primary school. Furthermore, the researcher's employment within this site provided the circumstances necessary to carry out a research methodology which entailed insider research. Before beginning the research process, the school was contacted and arrangements were made for the terms under which ethical approval would be granted for data collection.

This study sought to challenge the ideological role which curriculum reform plays in schooling by exploring secondary students' views about learning. To achieve this aim, the research inquired into the views of post-primary Irish students' about learning, based upon their experience of the new Junior Cycle, while working alongside a small group of pupils as assistant researchers. The intention was to gather students' views about the purpose of learning and how this was informed by their experiences of curriculum reform schooling. By adopting this approach, the study aimed to investigate the link between market ideology and student

learning under curriculum reform. In doing so, it was hoped that through a joint process of exploration and data analysis, student researchers would begin to recognize the ways in which their learning was informed by ideological assumptions.

In seeking to understand the effects of Junior Cycle reform on students' perceptions of learning, the study focused on the views of Transition Year (TY) students. The focus of the study was to capture the thought processes generated in the expression of participants' views about learning. By exploring participant views in this way, thinking processes were captured, revealing the perceptions of the student when discussing the purpose of learning. A detailed breakdown of the exact process that was followed will be provided in the next section.

5.4.5 Who gathered the data?

It is important to begin by noting that a limitation is reached when studying issues of socialization involving the lives of others, as the researcher risks distorting the research subjects' experiences through the data which they gather (Lynch and O'Neill, 1994, p.17). Therefore, in order overcome the limitations of traditional qualitative research a method of co-operative inquiry was used to carry out an empirical study in which the researcher worked alongside a small group of students as assistant researchers. For this study, five Transition Year students were individually selected to participate as assistant research participants in the study, subject to voluntary interest. It should be noted here that this process of data collection with student participants formed a key part of the action undertaken in the study and served as the primary source of data used to address the final research question outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

Before beginning the research process with students, those who were selected to work as assistant researchers first took part in lone interviews, in which they were posed questions about their schooling experience. For example, the students were asked 'have you noticed any extra

attention being given to subjects in school?' and 'have you felt that pressure has been put on you in school to choose certain subjects?' The purpose of these interviews was to collect the views of the student researchers before they in turn began to collect data about the views of their peers, so that they could be used as a later point of comparison, once the study had been completed. All questions posed to these students were drawn from the exact same study questionnaire that they later distributed to their peers in their role as assistant researchers. It was hoped that participation in these interviews would prompt the assistant researchers to consider how their own views are formed before exploring those of others. To facilitate this choice of research method, student researchers subsequently received minor training in both data collection and analysis at two separate stages [detailed below]. This training was be provided by the main researcher, using PowerPoint presentations and content drawn from the modules on research methods provided the researcher's registered university. Once location, consent and classroom requirements had been arranged, a plan for recording data was be devised. As this research focused on student discourse in a secondary context, it was important to gain the most accurate record possible for speech capturing and for this reason an electronic recording device was used. This approach to capturing speech recordings in school settings is both widely documented and supported (Edwards and Westgate, 1994, Christie, 2001, Swann, 2001). The data gathered in this study primarily took the form of field notes, questionnaires and audio recordings. These data samples were collected from:

- Individual interviews with assistant research participants before the research process has commenced.

- Research training exercises completed by the student researchers before gathering field notes.

- Field notes gathered by the student researchers.

- Research training exercises completed by the student researchers after gathering field notes.

- Questionnaires distributed by assistant researchers participants to their peers.

- Research training exercises completed by the student researchers after data has been collected.

- Individual interviews with assistant research participants after the research process has concluded.

Complete transcripts for each of these data samples may be viewed in the appendices attached at the end of this thesis.

5.4.6 Participant Recruitment

While gaining consent from the parents/guardians of prospective study participants at the beginning of the year, another phase of the research process was also initiated. This phase involved choosing student volunteers to participate in the study as assistant researchers. It is appropriate to remind the reader here that given the principal researcher's previous experience as teacher in the school, they were known to most of the student body, having taught many of them directly or interacted with them in an extra-curricular capacity. According to Freire (1972) and Shor (1992), a pedagogical bond between teachers and students is a fundamental condition for critical pedagogy to succeed within the context of formal education settings. To satisfy this criterion, the researcher identified both individuals and small groups of students who could participate as researchers within the study. Questions which the researcher had to consider before asking students to participate included:

- How many students researchers are required for the project?

- Would the project be more successful if these students were friends or strangers to one another?

- Does the principal researcher hold conscious or unconscious biases towards them? If so, are these biases warranted?

- Do these students have the ability to complete this project, regardless of their academic record?

- Will these students benefit from participating in this project in the way that is intended?

In light of the above, the following criteria were used to determine which students should be invited to take part in the project:

- A professional bond must already exist between the researcher and these students.

- A conscious decision must be made to ensure that no other criteria are used for selection or exclusion of student volunteers for the role of researcher [e.g. behaviour; class; grades; literacy; race etc].

- Upon invitation, student volunteers should have time commitment and willingness to meet the expectations required of this role.

In view of the above considerations, the principal researcher ultimately elected to invite a peer group of five Caucasian male students with whom he had formed a professional relationship during my first year in the school. The rationale behind this decision was three-fold:

- Firstly, as suggested, the students were chosen based upon a relationship which was formed while the principal researcher taught in the capacity of RE teacher to all five of these students as part of the same class group during their Junior Certificate.

- Secondly, it was determined that the project was more likely to be successful is the researchers in question were known to one another and had previously demonstrated their ability to work as a group in regular classroom lessons.

- Thirdly, this group of friends represented a diverse mix of academic ability; socio-economic backgrounds; parents/guardians and professional aspirations.

All five students elected to partake in the project and were assigned pseudonyms in order to both conceal their identities and protect those around them. The names assigned to these students were as follows: Brian; David; Damien; Richard and Tim. Further biographical details about each of these individuals is outlined in chapter seven.

5.4.7 Participant Involvement

The overall extent to which participants were involved as assistant researchers in the project is summarized below in the four phases of reflection and action of a co-operative inquiry-based approach. Following their completion of an initial interview, the assistant research participants:

Phase 1: Helped to develop a set of processes for collecting data throughout the study process.

Phase 2: Became co-subjects in the study by engaging in agreed actions and observing/recording the outcomes of their own and each other's action and experience.

Phase 3: Engaged in deeper experiential engagement which informs new practical skills and understandings associated with the study.

Phase 4: Re-assembled to inform and share their practical and experiential data.

As part of this process, assistant researchers were provided with opportunities throughout the study to make recommendations about how to reframe original ideas, pose new questions, amend inquiry procedures and suggest new ways of gathering data.

In order to research with students, it was important to clearly outline the nature of their role and the level to which they would be involved in the research process. To this end, these students were be briefed on the aim of the research project, the method of inquiry chosen and

the extent to which they would be involved as assistant research participants, prior to study commencement. These protocols were taken to ensure that the assistant research participants clearly understood the aims of the study and their responsibilities as assistant researchers before any research is undertaken.

5.4.8 How were data gathered?

Carspecken (1992) describes a five-stage process of data generation and analysis which is known was 'Critical Research Methodology' [CRM] and can be broken down as follows:

1. Monological data collection

2. Preliminary reconstructive analysis

3. Dialogical data generation

4. Describing systems relationships

5. Explaining systems relationships

Further work in relation to CRM is outlined in Carspecken's text (1996) which focuses on applied approaches to issues within social as well as educational disciplines. Data was therefore be gathered and analysed in accordance with the five stages of critical qualitative research listed above. In keeping with the tradition of critical theory, this approach to data collection enabled the researcher to examine culture through '…the lens of power, prestige, privilege, and authority in response to an ethical responsibility to address unfairness or injustices and attempts to achieve positive social change' (Harrowing, 2010, p.242). The five stages of CRM are outlined in further detail below.

Stage 1: Compiling the primary record through the collection of monological data

Researchers begin the research process by positioning themselves as outsiders so as to limit the impact of their presence within the research setting. Researchers subsequently proceed to build

a primary record by taking notes about both the research site and study subjects from the vantage of an external observer using written/audio/visual recording. This stage therefore seeks to gather information about proceedings within the research site such as daily routines and social patterns.

Stage 2: Preliminary reconstructive analysis

Researchers begin to analyse the primary record of data collection to identify evidence of potential patterns; routines and social relations. This aspect of the analysis is reconstructive as it seeks to draw connections between cultural factors and societal influences which may not be immediately recognizable to participants. This stage attempts to answer questions relating to hierarchy; rules and how decisions are made within the research setting.

Stage 3: Dialogical data generation

Stage three of the process focuses on generating data with assistant research participants by transitioning from an outsider role to an insider position. As such, this stage will require assistant research participants to enter the research site and directly engage with their peers through the lens of study subjects. In this way, the information gathered in stages 1 and 2 will be explored through an interactive method of data collection, using field notes and mixed-method interviews. This aspect of the research approach is crucial to the practice of critical qualitative research as it democratizes the research process by empowering participants to become agents of discovery, rather than solely being subjects of study unto themselves.

Stage 4: Discovering and describing system relations

This stage seeks to explain the meaning of the study by suggesting reasons for the experiences and structures described by research subjects in stages 1-3. Stage 4 attempts to discover the relationships between the specific site under study and external sites which may impact on the place of focus. Such systems relations are generally broad and can include ideological biases such as those which may be transmitted through political or economic discourses.

Stage 5: Explaining system relations

Stage 5 seeks to reconcile and critically examine the information gathered in stages 1-4 by exploring the ways in which select system relations inform the particular site of study. This final stage is therefore concerned with how dominant cultural discourses impact upon beliefs and routines of those studied within the research setting. In other words, the final stage is concerned with how '…behavioural routines are locked into system relations' (Georgiou, Carspecken, et al., 1996, p. 320).

If successful, the critical researcher will be able to examine the ways in which social structures inform participants' experiences and views both within the research setting and beyond (Carspecken, 1996). Adopting this methodological approach allowed for data to be collected and analysed in a neat and systemized way. The findings gathered from the empirical research were recorded on an electronic recording device before being transcribed into a text document and further analysed in accordance with the methodology outlined above. While the five stages are not meant to be strictly sequential, Carspecken and Apple (1992) recommend beginning with a temporal sequence of stages one to three, starting with the generation of observational data, construction of a preliminary analysis on this data and generation of another set of data based on interactions with the subjects of the study. Once stages one to three have been conducted, the investigator may reemploy them; that is, conduct further observations and further interviews between periods of analysis. The last two stages perform additional analyses on the information generated in stages one to three. In stage four, relationships between the routines and cultural forms exhibited by one group of people on a social site are compared to routines and cultural forms exhibited in other social sites to reveal systems relationships. In stage five, reasons for these systems relationships are sought by building the findings outward toward a general model of society. Carspecken & Apple (1992, p.523) express this more succinctly when they suggest that:

> We can be mistaken about representations of our own states and about interpretations of others' states. The ethnographer must therefore dialogically facilitate self-exploration and self-representation with an individual to gain some understanding of subjectivity.

This excerpt serves to underline how, in critical ethnographic research, the process of knowledge generation is a mutual and dialogical process where both parties hope to come to some common understanding of the problem at hand.

The stages of development outlined above provide a framework for guiding students from a position of passive acceptance as learners toward a critical awareness of their learning situation, by understanding the power relations between schooling and society. Freire (1972) termed this process 'critical consciousness' which he described as the pedagogical journey that assists learners in questioning their socio-historical situation. This transition from implicit consciousness to critical awareness does not occur immediately but is grounded in the experiences and daily lives of the participants – a process which Freire described as 'reading the world'. Within this context, the teacher is a facilitator who guides and questions instead of providing answers and directions for the learner.

5.5 Data Analysis

The process of organising, processing and analysing the student data was achieved using tools borrowed from grounded theory and specifically the open/axial coding system suggested by Strauss & Corbin (1990, p.160). Open coding refers to a process of identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena found in the text (interview transcripts, diaries and so on) where each line, sentence and paragraph is read in search of the answer to the repeated questions: What's going on here?' 'What is the main problem of the participants? And: 'How are they trying to solve it?'   Axial coding is the process of relating categories to their

subcategories in order to identify some central characteristic or phenomenon (the axis) around which differences in properties or dimensions exist. Here, data is reassembled, in a way that draws attention to the relationships between and within categories. Strauss and Corbin refer to this process as a 'close encounter' between the researcher and the data where the actual procedures for analysing data are not important as the tasks of identifying 'the essence or meaning in the data' (1990, p.162). This process of coding and analysis would allow for primary thematic strands, as well as sub-ordinate themes to emerge in relation to participants' experiences of the New Junior Cycle.

Primary themes were generated by conducting a thematic analysis of the responses which are generated from the empirical study. This analysis took place in two separate stages in order to facilitate the different types of data which are produced from the research project i.e. qualitative and quantitative data sets were analysed separately from one another and using different methods of interpretation. Furthermore, both the Microsoft Excel and Word software programmes were used to assist in the process of data analysis and theme generation. This software played a nominal role in the organization of themes generated by the data. The quantitative responses from each individual questionnaire were imported into a single Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, in preparation for a mass computational analysis. By contrast, the qualitative responses from each questionnaire were transcribed into their own individual Word documents, to ensure that each one received a separate analysis. All open-text responses were organized and subjected to a thematic analysis using the tools for grounded inquiry described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). This analysis resulted in the generation of primary themes and sub-themes, which were used to elicit further meaning from the questionnaires. The themes which emerged from this analysis were then categorized and represented in graphic statistics. By contrast, all closed-text responses were formatted in Microsoft Excel before then being converted into statistics using online software and represented in graphic form. Both sets of

findings were then analysed concurrently in order to make sense of the study results as a whole. In order to guide the reader through the steps which were taken to produce these results, a visual breakdown of this methodological process is provided in the appendices [Appendix A]. This visual includes charts, examples and diagrams to fully explain the analytical nature of the steps involved. The next section will detail the data sample which was involved the empirical study that was carried out as part of this thesis.

5.6 Data Sample

A data sample refers to the set of participants that are included within a research study. This sample is often a subset of a larger body of individuals and usually represents the characteristics a wider group of people (Favaretto et al, 2020). Data samples are used within qualitative research when bigger groups are too large to test or when a concern is better addressed by focusing on a specific set of individuals (Creswell, 2000).

5.6.1 Student researchers

The primary data sample for this study was drawn from a small cohort of Transition Year (TY) students. TY is an optional gap year which post-primary students may elect to take following the completion of Junior Cycle (GCSE) and before entering Senior Cycle (A Levels). All five of these students were Caucasian males whom the principal researcher had previously taught in a direct capacity. These students were chosen as the primary sample group for this research study three reasons:

- A pedagogical relationship existed between the principal researcher and these five students. This criterion offered a level of research security that these students would be willing to meaningfully participate in the empirical study.

- These students were long-time friends with one another and had previously demonstrated their ability to work together as a group in classroom lessons. This criterion provided a level of professional assurance that these students would be able to work alongside one another as part of a research team.

- These students represented a diverse mix of academic ability, socio-economic backgrounds, parents/guardians and professional aspirations. This criterion provided a level of ethical assurance that the students chosen for this project were not selected upon grounds which could be deemed to be discriminatory.

All five students elected to partake in the project upon invitation from the study gate keeper and were assigned pseudonyms in order to both conceal their identities and protect those around them. The names assigned to these students were as follows: Brian; David; Damien; Richard and Tim. Further biographical details about each of these individuals is outlined in chapter six.

5.6.2 Data Sample: Student Participants

The secondary data sample for this study was drawn from a complete year group of seventy Transition Year (TY) students (excluding five student researchers), from an overall student body of 840 pupils. These students were chosen as the secondary sample group for this research study, as they represented the body of pupils with the most recent and complete experience of the new Junior Cycle curriculum. This inquiry entailed the distribution and collection of a completed questionnaire from each participant. An example of the process employed for an analysis of the data generated from these questionnaires may be viewed in the appendices attached to the end of this thesis [Appendix A].

5.6.3 Research Training

It was anticipated that a further research limitation which may have arisen was the expected concern that the students chosen to participate in this project would have no prior academic

experience or research training skills. As such, a question was raised regarding their ability to competently engage as researchers in a qualitative ethnographic study. However, it was noted that students have displayed a proficiency in relation to several aspects of academic research, including: designing research questions (Gray & Winter, 2011; Lundy et al, 2011); research design (Kellett et al., 2004); choosing the research methodology (Gray & Winter, 2011; Lundy et al, 2011); collecting data (Gray & Winter, 2011; Jones, 2004); interpreting findings (Coad & Evans, 2008; Jones, 2004; Lundy et al, 2011) and distributing results (Gray & Winter, 2011; Jones, 2004; Kellet et al, 2004; Lundy et al, 2011).

In order to facilitate this choice of approach, it is the student researchers were provided with minor training in research methods by the main researcher. This training was designed to provide student research participants with the sufficient ability to understand the basic principles of research design and data collection. This training also equipped the student researchers with the necessary basic skill to carry out an academic research project to the standard required for the project role. This research training took place in the researcher's own classroom space, subject to timetable agreement between students, their parents/guardians and the school. This training took place in two separate stages. The first stage focused on research design and took place prior to study commencement, while the second stage focused on data analysis and took place remotely after the data has been collected. Full details of how this research training was delivered are provided in chapter six. These details are not included in this section as they form part of the thesis research findings.

5.6.4 Research Validity

Newton (2013, p.3) defines validity as '…how well a test measures what it claims to measure'. The validity of a truth claim is thus contingent upon the criteria against which it is measured. These criteria are often tied to the dominant research paradigm which is employed in a study.

For this reason, research that is conducted through a qualitative lens is often driven by a spirit of exploration and discovery through inquiry into the human experience. As such, the truth value of such research is determined by the extent to which it addresses an issue which has been identified. This outlook is captured well in the words of Kincheloe (1998, p.60) who notes that '…when we evaluate an interpretive account, we are not trying to determine whether it has provided validated knowledge or timeless truth, but rather we are asking whether our concern has been answered'. By contrast, the validity of quantitative research is determined by its empirical replicability. Such research attempts to '…test a theory consisting of variables by measuring with numbers and analysing with statistics in order to determine if the theory explains or predicts phenomena of interest' (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 2).

The research study which was conducted as part of this thesis contained a mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis. The data which was collected was therefore judged in accordance with separate criteria. As previously indicated, the examples of the processes which were used to analyse this data have been outlined in the appendices of this thesis [Appendix A]. The criteria which were used to determine the validity of the numerical data gathered from the research questionnaires was achieved by comparing the findings to statistics from the Central Applications Office [CAO]. This database served as a benchmark against which the data empirical produced in the study could be compared. Using this database, it was possible to ascertain whether or not a co-relation existed between the two sets of figures. Furthermore, a number of anticipated findings were also set out prior to the completion of the empirical study. These predictions are outlined in the next chapter.

As previously described, the qualitative data gathered in this study was collected using the critical research methodology described by Carspecken (1992). While the data generated from this study was analysed using the tools from grounded theory outlined by Strauss and Corbin

(1990). The validity of the qualitative data which was gathered from interviews with the student researchers was judged in accordance with the criteria set out below:

- Was it plausible, convincing?

- Did it fit with other material we know?

- Did it have the power to change practice?

- Was the researcher's understanding transformed?

- Was a solution uncovered?

- Were new possibilities opened up for the researchers, research participants and the structure of the context? (Kincheloe, 1998)

Using these questions as a guiding metric, it was possible for the researcher to create a standard against which the validity of the interpretive data gathered could be compared and verified.

5.6.5 Data Reliability

Reliability refers to the possibility and probability of a test producing consistent results when it is repeated on separate occasions (Kidd 2006). Research methods which ask for the opinions of research participants may result in different responses on different occasions. This is because the research participants may have been affected by a recent event or changed over time (Bell and Waters, 2014). Kincheloe (1998) rejects the importance of reliability within social research because it operates from the positivist assumption that all valid knowledge can only be achieved in accordance with the terms of quantitative criteria. By contrast, he posits that valid knowledge may also be drawn from the individual experiences of marginalized groups within subjective contexts and at separate points of interview. Nevertheless, Patton (2002) contends that qualitative researchers should attempt to strengthen the integrity of the data which they

collect through use of triangulation. Thus, in order to satisfy the demands of both quantitative and qualitative demands, the reliability of the data collected in this study was assessed using a mixed-methods paradigm. This process involved the transcription and quantification of interview responses through use of coded themes (quantitative). Subsequently, these themes were interpreted by the principal researcher (qualitative). As such, it is important to recognize that researcher positionality plays an important role in how collected data is interpreted and understood. This is to suggest that data may be interpreted differently depending on the philosophical values of those who are involved in the research study. Consequently, the reliability of the data gathered in this study was enhanced by comparing data from each of the questionnaires against one another and also by considering the views of the student researchers who were involved in the empirical study. The next section will outline the ethical considerations which were involved in gaining approval for this research study.

5.7 Research Ethics

There are several practical points of ethical consideration which need to be addressed in planning to conduct a qualitative study with students, namely: issues of consent; the capacity of students to conduct research; student/teacher power differentials and remuneration. Consequently, the following sections will detail the efforts which were taken to address the foregoing concerns.

5.7.1 Ethical consent

This researcher was cognizant that all qualitative research carries with it the responsibility to protect the welfare of all participants involved, as its first point of concern. As such, careful effort was taken to ensure that information and consent forms were distributed to the following parties for approval, amendment and signed return before commencing the study:

1. University Ethics Board.

2. Participating Post-Primary School
3. Parents/guardians of participating students.
4. Participating students.

Following receipt of written consent, all participating parties were afforded an additional seven-day period of grace before the research process commenced. Both parents of participating pupils and students themselves were afforded the right to withdraw from the project at any point, without consequence. All of the above parties were also afforded the right to contact the researcher at any time throughout the process in order to address any queries which they may have had about the study.

5.7.2 Research Power Differences

Although students played an important role in the research process both as study subjects and researchers, it was necessary to distinguish between their role and that of the main researcher. The reasons for this distinction were twofold. Firstly, it was important that the main researcher held the power to make any final decisions relating to the study to ensure that it retained both focus and direction. Secondly, while it was desirable to involve students as fully as possible within the research process, it was also recognized that assumptions about complete equality were problematic given both the age and skillset of the individuals in question (Heron and Reason, 2006).

5.7.3 Teacher Power Differentials

In the case of this research project, it was expected that the researcher would be already be known to assistant researchers in the role of school teacher and that they would likely have been taught in a direct classroom setting, prior to study commencement. Consequently, the researcher recognized that the power gap between adult researchers and student researchers could not be overlooked when conducting a research project with students in the context of a

school (Conolly, 2008; Kellett et al, 2004). It was anticipated that the altered power dynamic contained within this type of research approach could involve some of following concerns:

- Student concern that their opinions will be shared with other members of school staff/peers.

- Student concern that failure to comply with or meet the expectations of the main researcher will affect their grades.

- Student concern that withdrawing from the research process or offering alternative viewpoints could affect their relationship with the main researcher.

- Student misunderstanding about their role as assistant researcher or the extent to which they will be included in the research process.

As a result, the following measures were taken to pre-empt and address any power dynamics which could arise exist between the researcher and assistant participants throughout the study:

- Student researchers met prior to study commencement in order to clarify roles and set parameters for team conduct. Students were fully briefed about the extent of their role and when their participation in the process would formally end.
- Student researchers were given written and verbal assurance that their opinions would not be shared with other members of staff or their peers until all data has been fully anonymized.
- Student researchers were given written and verbal assurance that any disagreement with the main researcher would not affect their relationship with their professional relationship or their grades. In the event that students felt this agreement had not been upheld, provisions were made to ensure that they could speak to the study gatekeeper at any time during or after the study process had concluded.
- Student researchers were provided with access to anonymous feedback forms through which they could express any concerns that they may have throughout the study process.
- Student researchers had access to a third-party gatekeeper [vice-principal] who acted as an external arbitrator throughout the research process in the event that student

researchers wished to express any concerns that they may have held about the process, either verbally or through an anonymous feedback form.

- Student researchers were afforded the right to withdraw from the study process at any point by completing an anonymous 'opt out' form that was kept by the study gatekeeper.

- Student researchers were made aware that any decision to opt out from the study would affect neither their grades or relationship with the main researcher, as it was accepted that extenuating circumstances could arise which may have inhibited full participation.

It was anticipated that the main researcher would have the final say on any decisions relating directly to the scope or content of the PhD, but that any objections or alternative recommendations made by assistant research participants would be noted and included in the research findings. Thus, it was recognized that although involving students as assistant researchers in this research project changed traditional power dynamics, it did not remove them altogether (Kellet, 2011). Likewise, it was hoped that the mitigating efforts outlined above would enable student researchers to communicate their views about the extent and validity of their participatory role in an honest fashion.

5.7.5 Remuneration

As the student researchers volunteered for this study, it was anticipated that they would take on extra work relating to the research in their free time. Thus, the question of remuneration was a valid one and was not ignored in the context of this study. However, the researcher elected not to incentivize potential student research participants in order to gain their participation in the study, as to do so would have directly undermined the purpose which the study sought to achieve. Equally, in the event that the researcher elects to express gratitude to assistant researchers for their work upon completion of the research project, any such gift is likely to follow a conventional form, such as a gift card and will be only be offered with full approval from both school authorities and the consent of the parents/guardians of those involved.

5.8 Research Limitations

Broadly speaking, there are two main approaches which have dominated qualitative research as a mode of inquiry over the past century. The first approach is described by Mercer (2007) as form of inquiry which involves a researcher exploring a topic of interest from the vantage point of an outsider, in order to retain a degree of objectivity and neutrality. The second approach, outlined by Hockey (1993) involves a researcher studying an area which they are already familiar with, either through direct cultural exposure or linked to their profession.

Spradley (1980, p.86) informs us that '…every human society is culturally constituted, and, as outsiders, ethnographers participate, observe and ask questions to discover the cultural meanings known to insiders' (1980, p.86). By contrast, ethnographers who work within the context of a designated research site that is known to them, often find it easier to gain access to important information, which may otherwise be denied to an outsider. Given that the study detailed above involved the principal investigator working with students in the context of a secondary school, it is important to discuss matters surrounding insider research and the implications which these issues hold for teachers as researchers. This section will briefly unpack both the potential benefits and limitations that are involved when carrying out inquiry in which the researcher is known to those who are under study.

5.8.1 Advantages of Insider Research

Edwards (2002, p.72) notes that one of the main advantages of insider research is '…the knowledge the researcher brings concerning history and cultures, and an awareness of body language, semiotics and slogan systems operating within the cultural norms of the organisation or group'. This is to suggest that through everyday interactions with participants, researchers who operate at an inside level are able to access a level of semiotic depth which is denied to those who seek to know about the lives of individuals but do not share or attempt to understand

their experience (Blaikie, 2000). Unlike other approaches to data collection, inside researchers seek to hear the voices of those who are often ignored or marginalized within academic research (Mason, 2002). Correspondingly, by adopting a direct line of inquiry to participants' views, inside researchers eschew those approaches which inadvertently claim ownership over the lived experiences of others. Importantly, this type of enables researchers to locate their study within the broader historical and social conditions which surround the experiences of their participants.

5.8.2 Disadvantages of Insider Research

Perhaps the most common concern surrounding insider research is the question of truth in such forms of inquiry and potential for bias, both in the research design and analysis of data (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). Researchers who operate in close proximity to their subjects have the capacity to exercise a significant degree of power over both participants and the conditions in which the study is conducted. Consequently, researchers who hold a familiar with study participants risk influencing any information which is shared with them by the very nature of their relationship. Distortions of data are not always intended, but can occur through involuntary encounters between the researcher and study participants. For example, involuntary actions, such as body language or other non-verbal ques may elicit responses which the participants think the researcher wants to hear. Equally, it is possible that some members of the study pool hold a pre-existing antagonism toward the researcher. Consequently, a potential reliance may be formed around participants with whom the researcher already feels comfortable. These instances offer an insight into the complexities of relationships in studies involving insider research. It is important, therefore, that careful efforts are taken by insider researchers to familiarise themselves with the potential implications of their chosen approach and to take any steps possible to avoid jeopardizing the validity of their study.

5.8.3 Teachers as Researchers

Teachers who act as insider researchers possess an important understanding of the rich underpinnings which shape the grouping and structures of schooling as an organisation. Through their everyday interactions with colleagues and students, teachers often hold a unique insight into various dynamics which affect the conditions in which learning takes place. In both cases, teachers frequently have access to valuable perspectives which arrive through levels of trust which have been developed over a period of time, ranging from months to years. Given these conditions, teachers as researchers find themselves in a position of privilege which offers them the opportunity to share the experiences and voices which are often absent or overlooked in traditional forms of data collection. In the words of Kincheloe (1991, p.15):

> Here is where the importance of our phenomenological, semiotic and ethnographic forms of qualitative research become so important to the teacher researcher. They provide the tools with which we reveal the forces which make schools what they are, which tacitly construct the goals of education in an industrial society.

In this way, teachers who possess insider knowledge are well placed when compared to outsider researchers who often adopt a 'get in-get the data-get out' approach to research inquiry (Rist, 1970, p.441). Furthermore, as state employees, teachers serve as the medium through which education is delivered as a public service. This role often means that teachers functions as the agents through which policy visions; political narratives and cultural shifts are communicated within schooling. Research in schooling helps teachers to become critical of what they teach and its impact upon learners in the classroom. School-based inquiry assists teachers in connecting their professional actions to the broader events which take place outside of the school walls. This outcome is achieved through the 'bottom-up' perspectives of learning which are gained by teachers in systems often dominated by 'top-down' directives on teaching (Kincheloe, 2002). By explicating these links, teachers gain a greater awareness of the implications which their role possesses for current and future generations of students. Through their actions, '…critical teachers as researchers understand the centrality of power in

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understanding everyday life, knowledge production, curriculum development, and teaching' (Kincheloe, 2002, p.17). It was with this narrative in mind that the research study described above was devised.

5.8.4 Students as Researchers

Given that the majority of research which takes place in schooling focuses on student learning, it is not surprising that some students may wish to have a more active role in the development of their classroom experiences when presented with an opportunity to do so. As one student researcher puts it '…education is for students and therefore students should have a say in it' (as cited in Fielding and Bragg, 2003, p.3). Moreover, Kellet et al. (2005) highlights that even the most experienced researchers do not have the capacity to capture a student's understanding of the world in the same way that a young person can. As Bradbury (2014, p.19) puts it '…while many adults undoubtedly *do* have greater knowledge than many children, it is children who outstrip adults on knowledge of childhood'. Understood in this way, there exists a legitimate argument that recognizes students' right to be taken seriously as ethnographers who possess the capacity to explore their own realities, recognize circumstances particular to their context, and actively inform the society in which they belong (Alderson, 2000).

While the concept of 'student voice' exists within many schools, it often functions as a narrow route through which pupils can express their views about school life and experiences of learning (Alderson and Arnold, 1999). This reality contradicts the supposedly democratic conditions in which such learning takes place and denies students the right to experience an ideal which they are taught to promote. In this way, schools often neglect students by failing to provide them with spaces in which they can develop their skills as citizens through active participation. One such approach to overcoming this limitation is by involving students as researchers within school-based research. Alderson (2000) suggests a number of different ways in which students may typically become involved within research. Firstly, in the context of

organized learning, students have been known to use active learning methods to investigate coursework topics through research approaches such as interviews, questionnaires and data analysis. Secondly, students of all ages have participated in adult-led research where they have helped to plan questions, collect data, analyse findings and publish reports. For adult researchers, such approaches are often used as:

• A way to gather better quality data through insider research

• A means of accessing the lived experiences of students who are difficult to reach

• A method of learning how the perspectives of young people differ from those of adults (Kirby, 1999).

Other types of investigation involving students as researchers have included studies which were initiated and led by children and teenagers (West, 1997) or those in which power dynamics were reversed when adults were included by students (Pratt and Loizos, 1992). Additionally, such approaches may also be used by adult researchers as an alternative form of pedagogical instruction. Linked to this approach, Kellett (2010) documents that student researchers are often surprised to learn that their peers to do not share the same opinions as them. The above examples offer a glimpse into the many ways in which both adults and students can learn from one another through joint research investigations.

Every society has conception of education and attempts to realize this ideal through schooling. Within this context, teachers function as intermediate actors to control and shape the behaviour of students, who, in turn, learn to reflect various expectations and standards (Weinstein, 2009). The process of schooling is often highly mechanical and presents little opportunity for the traditional dynamics of teaching and learning to be explored or questioned (Giroux, 1984). Similarly, in relation to research, the majority of studies involving students as researchers in

schooling have tended to include pupils in nominal roles, such as questionnaire distribution and collection. This is to suggest that the duties and responsibilities given to students by adult researchers often come from a position of authority and are underpinned by traditional assumptions about what should be achieved and how (Todd, 2012). Such approaches, often indicate an unwillingness to loosen constraints on the research parameters and reflect a concern about both students' age and subsequent ability to complete a piece of research adequately by limiting their role. However, as Kellet (2004) notes, the skills required to participate in an academic study are not equivocal with being an adult, rather, they are equivocal with being a researcher. This issue is captured well in the words of Schafer and Yarwood (2008, p.519) who note that research approaches involving students are reliant not so much on the capabilities of children '…but rather on the willingness of researchers to consider the competence and agency of young children themselves'. Failure to recognize this pitfall, may result in investigations whereby student researchers exist in name only and prompt questions about who benefits or what is learned from such approaches (Kellett, 2010). Furthermore, teachers who work with students as researchers often do so with the planned intention of achieving outcomes which further support the traditional assumptions of learning within schooling, rather than challenging them (Kim et al, 2017). Thus, one of the possible problems of such studies is that they invariably re-enforce bad practices within schooling by failing to properly question the structures and processes which govern student learning. Consequently, it is worth pointing out that '…pupil engagement with issues related to teaching and learning is unlikely to succeed unless teachers too are continuing learners – involved in seeking new ideas, analysing results, being reflective, trying out new practices and working with others' (Kellet, 2004, p.67). To this end, it is clear that considerable preparation must take place when planning for the inclusion of students as researchers. Likewise, the standard of research completed reflects not just the

quality of the adult researcher but also their ability to think about and conduct a study in more than just a traditional fashion.

One overarching issue which governs this choice of research approach that has not yet been discussed is the question of power relations. Power mediation is an issue of paramount importance when conducting research with children, given that they may be susceptible to influence from those older than them, particularly from those in positions of authority, such as parents or teachers (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012). However, it is worth pointing out here, that issues of power are not limited to the relationship between adult researchers and student researchers. There is evidence to suggest that questions of hierarchy and control also exist among student researchers themselves (Kellet, 2010). Thus, while it is remains true that adult researchers tend to possess more power than students, it is important to recognize that this is an over-simplification of the research dynamics involved in such studies. This point serves to challenge the traditional assumption that students are entirely powerless.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to create a transitory connection between the first four chapters (the introduction; detailing the structure and rationale guiding the thesis; the second chapter looking at Irish curriculum reform; the literature review which characterized these changes in the form of the hidden curriculum and a theoretical framework based around Freirean critical pedagogy), and what remains in this thesis. The chapter has provided a brief but succinct account of the methodology which was used to gather data for this research project and how this data was analysed. The purpose of the study was to gain a direct insight into the effects of ideological influence on students' perceptions of learning through an exploration of their experiences under curriculum reform. These insights were explored and recorded from the perspective of those

who have recently experienced this reform process. The journey into these perceptions of learning in Irish schooling will begin in the next chapter with a description of the research context in which the empirical study took place.

Chapter Six: Research Findings - Survey Data

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to begin the presentation of findings that were generated by the empirical research study detailed in the last chapter. The findings produced from this study will be divided into two separate chapters. Dividing the research findings in this way will ensure that each chapter holds a direct focus on each of the two remaining research questions. This first chapter will present the findings of a survey conducted of 70 TY students via questionnaire about their views on schooling and curriculum reform, while the next chapter will focus on the efficacy of the qualitative processes which were used to arrive at these outcomes. In this way, these chapters will respectively be tied to both the penultimate and final research questions

which the thesis hopes to answer. Using the data gathered from the study questionnaire, this chapter hopes to address the first of two remaining research questions, which is:

- What are students' perceptions of learning under recent curriculum reform?

As will become clear, the research methods and instruments used during the study were designed to elicit data which could answer this question. This first question will provide an important frame of reference in understanding both how the research design and questionnaire were developed and applied in practice when collecting data from participants. It should be noted here that the names of all people and locations contained within this and subsequent chapters have been changed in order to protect the identities of those involved in the study. In order to frame the empirical aspect of this study, the next section will begin with by outlining the background context to the site in which this research was conducted.

6.2 Research Context

St. Michael's College is a mixed voluntary secondary school which is located in the North East of the country, within close proximity to the border of Northern Ireland. The origins of the college can be traced to the nineteenth century, when it was established by a Catholic body with an express devotion toward a particular religious patron. The college has retained its faith ethos to the present day and is committed to upholding the values which are associated with its patronage on an active daily basis. The college has a strong local reputation for welcoming students from all faith and national backgrounds. The school's inclusiveness is indicated by the fact that pupils from forty-two different national backgrounds are currently enrolled in the college. At present, there are seven hundred and forty-four students who attend the college. The ratio of boys to girls in the college is roughly split 2:1 (39:23) in favour of the former.

Strong religious commitments are not an uncommon feature amongst secondary schools either locally or nationally but should be noted in this case, given the historical role of the town in

sectarian events of the past. Within this context, it is pertinent to note that the college sits near the centre of a historically nationalist town with a local population of forty thousand people. The town's history continues to inform local outlooks, which is evidenced in via popular support towards ideological issues such as politics (left-wing), religion (conservative) and national ideology (republican). These features mark the town as being distinct from most other parts of the country which generally hold opposing views to those which are upheld in this area. Additionally, the fact that the town is home to one of the most successful football teams in the country's history underpins its nationalist reputation. It is also known as one of the few areas on Ireland's east coast where the national language is still actively practised by the local population. It is pertinent to note here that prior to employment at St. Michael's College, the principal researcher had never before visited or lived in this part of the country and therefore learned about these historical customs and values from the perspective of an outsider.

Since the turn of the century, the town has gained a national reputation as a technological hub in which many multi-national corporations have established headquarters and franchises. Linked to these developments, the town is also home to a well reputed Institute for Technology, which draws 89% of its students from the north-east region and in turn, encompasses some of the most disadvantaged areas in the country (QQI, 2019). This statistic bears particular relevance to the empirical project at hand, given that aspects of the study will consider participants' motivations for learning, which may include particular college courses or learning institutes. A statistical breakdown of matriculation for students at St. Michael's College indicated that over a thirteen-year period (maximum statistics available), an average of 53.96% of students who completed their Leaving Certificate, continued on to study at this local institute for technology (Irish Times, 2020). This context is provided so as to offer the reader an insight into both the historical conditions in which the research site at hand has developed and has

continued to grow in a post-millennium context. The next section will describe how access to the research site was approached and obtained.

6.2.1 Access to Site

At the time of research application, the principal researcher had been working as a full-time classroom teacher in St. Michael's College for one full academic school year on a fixed-term capacity. Following the school board's decision to re-employ them in a permanent capacity, the principal researcher submitted a written application to the principal requesting permission to carry out an empirical study within the school. This application was received positively by both the board and principal who approved this request to conduct an empirical study with students, while also completing their contractual duties as an employee. All parties were satisfied that the study would cause minimum disruption to students' scheduled classroom learning and could commence at the beginning of the new academic year. It was agreed that the researcher would share the research findings with management once the study had been completed, subject to the anonymity and consent of individual student participants involved.

Subsequent to school approval, immediate preparations were made to begin the process of gaining consent from parents/guardians and students alike. This involved the distribution of specially designed letters outlining the purpose of the research as well as clearly stating the commitment required of participants taking part in the study. In order to expedite the process of form return, a school web-text was sent to the parents/guardians of all students involved in the study, requesting their response to the letter. This approach yielded a very high rate of response and resulted in the return of nearly all forms within seven working days. In all, consent was gained from the parents/guardians of seventy students within a two-week period at the beginning of the school year. This response rate represented a complete return on all forms which were distributed, with all respondents consenting to the participation of their children

within the study. The next section will detail the results which were anticipated from the research study prior to its commencement, based on the evidence presented in the literature review. These anticipated results will serve as a success criteria for the findings drawn from the empirical investigation.

6.2.2 Empirical Investigation: Anticipated Results

Drawing upon the themes and statistical evidence that were outlined in the literature review, the following results were anticipated from the empirical study.

- 1. An awareness amongst students of a bias in towards certain forms of subject learning, based upon market demand/employability for certain subjects i.e. they will recognize a bias in their learning towards Commerce/STEM/Practical Subjects over the humanities, based on their employability.
- 2. A general awareness amongst students of market demand for certain forms of subject learning based upon their employability i.e. they will recognize a market bias towards Commerce/STEM/Practical Subjects over the humanities, based on their employability.
- 3. A pattern in TY students' subject choices for their Leaving Cert i.e. they are more likely to choose subjects which they perceived to be employable/in market demand, rather than those which are not.

Using these anticipated results as success criteria, the next section will present the findings which were generated from the empirical investigation.

6.3 Study Results [Primary Findings]

The purpose of this section is to present student responses to the key questions which were gathered from the empirical investigation, as set out by the questionnaire design. The term 'key' in this context refers to that data which deemed most germane in answering the

penultimate research question stated at outset of this chapter. For this reason, the data presented in this section will only reflect the findings derived from ten key questions. These inquiries were divided into categories of 'open' and 'closed' questions. Namely, what are students' perceptions of learning under recent curriculum reform? Following the transcription of the completed questionnaires into a Word format, the primary researcher calculated and analysed the data generated from these re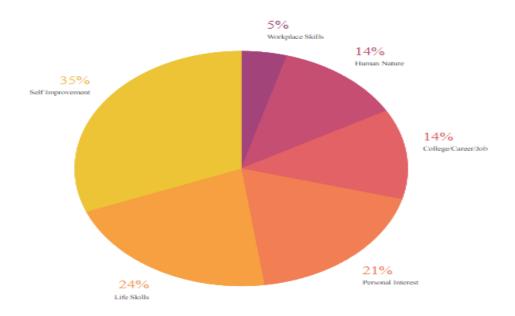sponses using an Excel spreadsheet To underscore their key role, the results of these key questions are represented in the form of graphic statistics below [Note: All statistics were calculated from 70 respondents, unless otherwise stated]:

Open Questions

Q.1 Why do people learn in general?
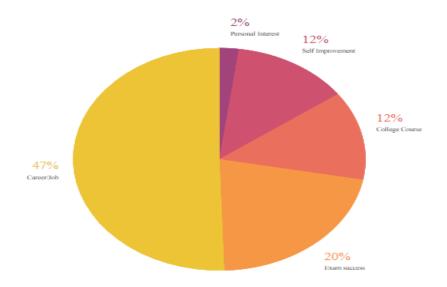
Fig 6.1: Why people learn in general

Finding 1:

The most important statistic derived from these results in relation to the research question at hand is that in total, 81% of students thought that people learn in general (outside of school) for intrinsic reasons, while just 19% thought that people learn in general for extrinsic reasons.

Q. 2 Why do people learn in school?

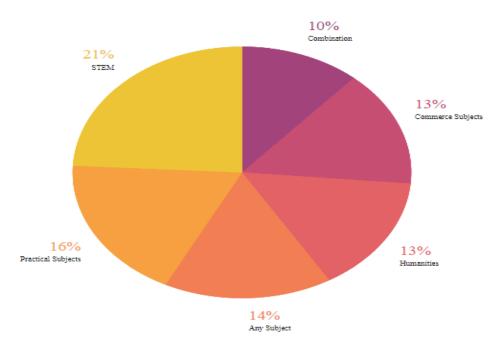**Fig 6.2: Why people learn in school**

Finding 2:

The most important statistic derived from these results in relation to the research question at hand is that in total, 79% (combined total) of students thought that people learn in school for extrinsic reasons, while just 2% thought that people learn in school out of personal interest.

Q.29 Based on your own current understanding, a qualification in which subject is *most likely* to help a person to get a professional job/career after school?

[Note: 1 person left this question blank and results were therefore calculated from the remaining 69 respondents.]

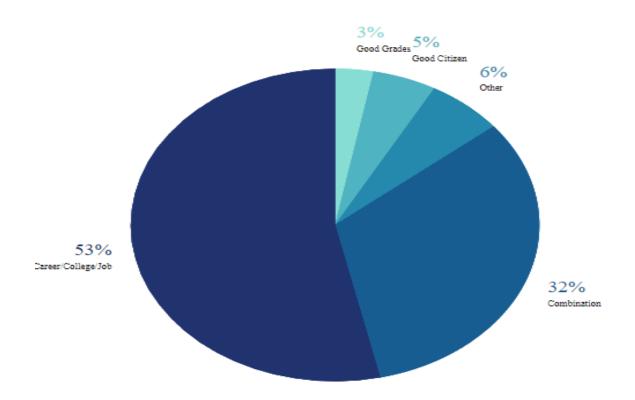**Fig 6.3: Most likely qualification to gain a professional job/career**

<u>Finding 3:</u>

The most important statistic derived from these results in relation to the research question at hand is that 50% (combined total) of students said that a qualification in STEM (21%); practical subjects (16%) or commerce (13%) was most likely to help a person to get a professional job/career after school. By contrast, just 13% of students said that a qualification in humanities was most likely to help a person get a professional job/career after school.

<u>Closed Questions</u>

Q. 3 Which of the following statements best reflects your motivation to learn in school? [Multiple Choice]
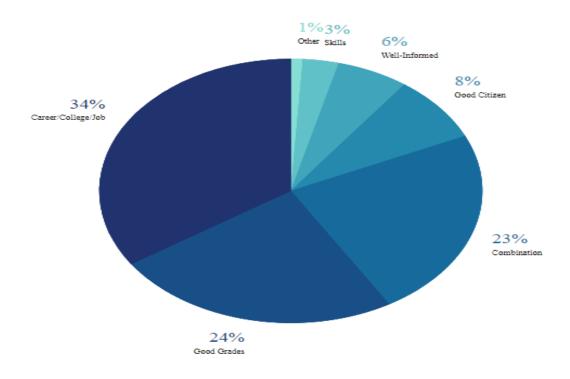
Fig 6.4: Motivation to learn in school

<u>Finding 4:</u>

The most important statistic derived from these results in relation to the research question at hand is that a significant majority (53%) of students said that their main motivation for learning in school was to access a particular career/college/job. By contrast, the smallest proportion of students (3%) said that their main motivation for learning in school was to get good grades.

Q.6 Based on your experience as a learner, which of the following statements best reflects what your school has tried to teach you over the past three years? [Multiple Choice]

Fig 6.5: What school has tried to teach me over the last three years

Fig: Pie chart showing percentages — Other 1%, Skills 3%, Well-Informed 6%, Good Citizen 8%, Combination 23%, Good Grades 24%, Career/College/Job 34%
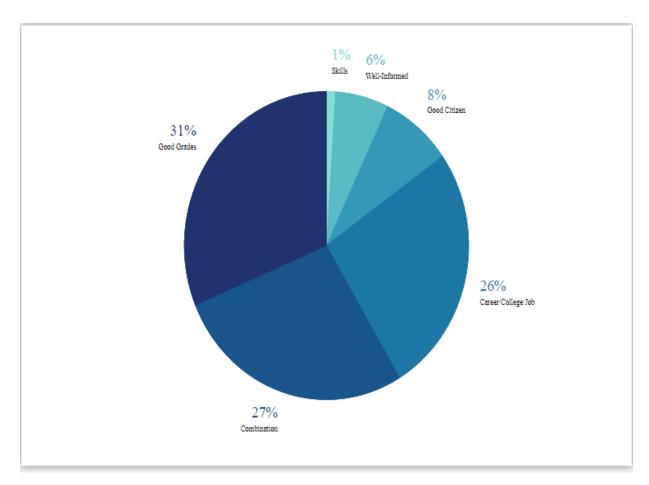
Finding 5:

The most important statistic derived from these results in relation to the research question at hand is that 34% of students said that the main thing school has tried to teach them over the past three years of learning is to get good grades, so that they can get good college courses/careers/jobs. Despite this, just 3% of students said that the main thing school has tried to teach them over the past three years of learning is employable skills for jobs that are economically in demand.

Q.7 Based on your experience as a learner, which of the following statements best reflects what you have learned in school over the past three years? [Multiple Choice]
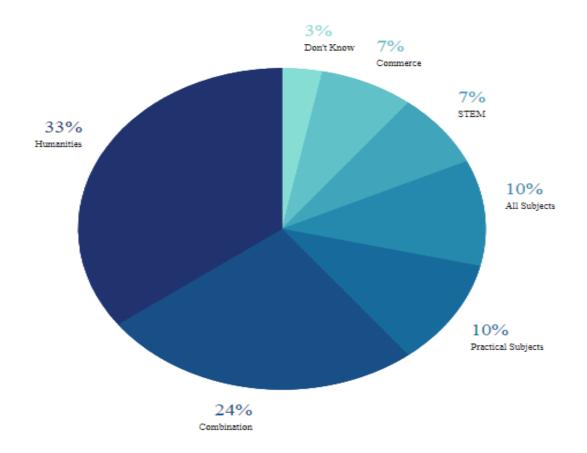**Fig 6.6: What I have learned in school over the last three years**

Finding 6:

The most important statistic derived from these results in relation to the research question at hand is that the majority of students (31%) said that the main thing they had learned over the past three years is to get good grades in general. Conversely, just 1% of students said that the main thing they had learned school over the past three years is employable skills for jobs that are economically in demand.

Q.16 Thinking about your experience of secondary school over the past three years, which subjects do *you* think are the most important in school?

[Note: 1 person left this question blank and results were therefore calculated from the remaining 69 respondents.]

Fig 6.7 The subjects I think are the most important in school

Finding 7:

The most important statistic derived from these results in relation to the research question at hand is that the majority of students (33%) thought that humanities subjects were the most important subjects in school. By contrast, 24% (combined total) of students thought that Commerce/STEM/Practical subjects were the most important subjects in school. Furthermore, 24% of students thought that a combination of subjects were the most important subjects in school.

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Q. 19 Over the past three years of learning, have you noticed any extra attention given to certain subjects in school, based on their importance in getting a *professional* job/career? Note: 4 people left this question blank and results were therefore calculated from the remaining 66 respondents.

Fig 6.8: Subjects which received extra attention

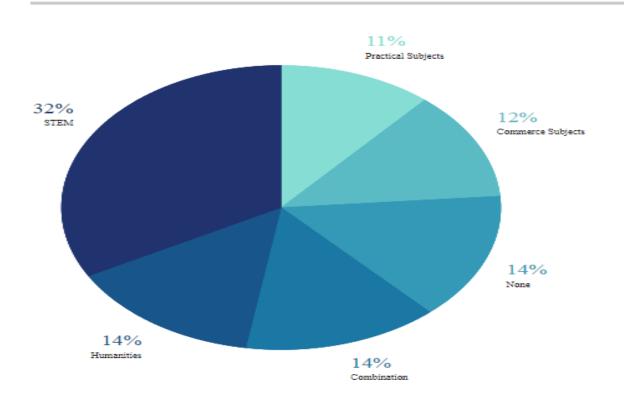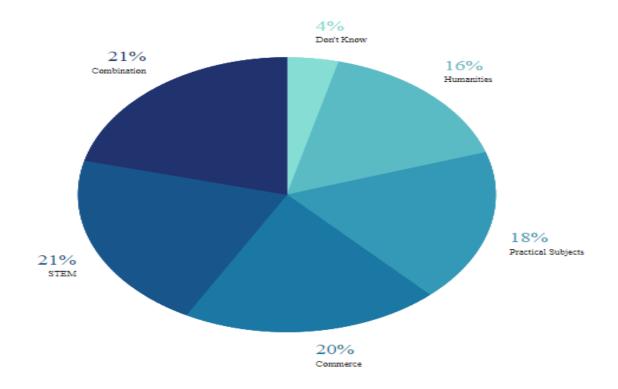|	
11% Practical Subjects	
32% STEM	12% Commerce Subjects
	14% None
14% Humanities	14% Combination

<u>Finding 8:</u>

The most important statistic derived from these results in relation to the research question at hand is that a significant majority (55% - combined total) of students said that they had noticed extra attention being given to Commerce Subjects, Practical Subjects or STEM subjects in school, based on their importance in getting a professional job/career. The majority of students (32%) said that they had noticed extra attention given to STEM subjects in school. By contrast, just 14% of students said that they had noticed extra attention being given to humanities subjects, based on their importance in getting a professional job/career.

Q.20 Based on your experience over the past three years of learning, which subjects do you think are *the most* professionally employable?

Fig 6.9: Subjects which are the most professionally employable

<u>Finding 9:</u>

The most important statistic derived from these results in relation to the research question at hand is that a significant majority (59% - combined total) of students said that they thought either Commerce Subjects, Practical Subjects or STEM were the most professionally employable subjects in school. By contrast, just 16% of students thought that humanities subjects were the most professionally employable subjects in school.

Q.22 Over the past three years of learning, have you felt that pressure has been put on you *in school* to choose certain subjects for the Leaving Cert?

Note: 4 people left this question blank and results were therefore calculated from the remaining 66 respondents.

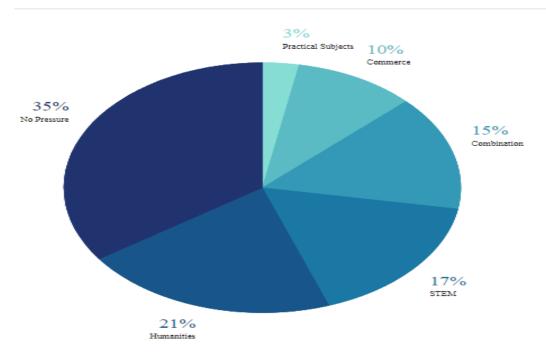**Fig 6.10: Pressure to choose subjects for the Leaving Cert**

Finding 10:

The most important statistic derived from these results in relation to the research question at hand is that the majority (65%) of students said that they had felt some form of pressure had been put on them in school to choose certain subjects for the Leaving Cert in general during the past three years. Of this amount, 30% (combined total) said that they had experienced pressure to choose Commerce; STEM or Practical Subjects. By contrast, 21% of students said that they had experienced pressure to choose Humanities subjects, while 15% said that said that they had experienced pressure to choose a combination of subjects in school for their Leaving Cert. Significantly, the highest single majority of students (35%) said that they felt that no pressure had been put on them in school to choose certain subjects for the Leaving Cert.

6.3.1 Study Results [Secondary Findings]

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief summary of other important statistics which emerged from the empirical investigation but did not constitute 'key' aspect of the original inquiry that was set out by the questionnaire design. A 'significant finding' in this context can be understood to mean a piece of data which plays a direct role in answering the penultimate research question set out at the beginning of this chapter. Therefore, the data presented in this summary is important as it provides a more complete framework within which the reader can understand the research findings as a whole. Significant findings were drawn from a further twenty questions in the empirical study. The results of these key questions are represented in the form of bullet-pointed summary below. Where appropriate, two or more statistics are presented together in order to highlight statistics which support or contrast one another [Note: All statistics were calculated out of 70 respondents, unless otherwise stated].

- **Finding 11:** The questionnaire showed that 75% of students said that personal interest best describes their motivation to learn in general [question 3]. By contrast, 47% of students surveyed said that personal interest best describes their motivation to learn in school [question 14].

- **Finding 12:** The questionnaire showed that 57% of students listed humanities subjects as their favourite subjects [question 8]. Similarly, 48% of students said that they most enjoyed learning about humanities subjects over the past three years [question 9]. Correspondingly, 47% of students said that they enjoyed learning about these subjects the most out of personal interest [question 10]. Moreover, the majority of students (26%) said teachers think humanities subjects are the most important in school [question 16].

- **Finding 13:** The questionnaire showed that 50% of students listed the humanities as their strongest subjects [question 11]. Furthermore, 37% of students said that these subjects were their strongest because they held a personal interest in them [question

12]. Of this figure, a combined total of 79% said that their strongest subjects were the same as their favourite subjects most of the time [question 13]. Similarly, more than half of all students (57%) said that their strongest subjects were always the same as their favourite subjects [question 13]. Overall, 38% of students said that they were most likely to choose humanities subjects for the Leaving Cert [question 24].

- **Finding 14:** The questionnaire showed that 78% of students said that selecting their strongest subjects will be one of the most important factors when choosing their subjects for the Leaving Cert [question 23]. Likewise, a further 64% said that subjects they enjoy most will be one of the most important factors when choosing their subjects for the Leaving Cert [question 23].

- **Finding 15:** In total, 76% of students thought that a qualification in either Commerce Subjects, Practical Subjects or STEM were most likely to help a person to get a professional career/job either because these subjects were generally employable (42%) or because of market demand for these areas of learning (34%) [question 29].

- **Finding 16:** A total of 76% of students (calculated from 68 respondents) said that they had a attended a career day or received a careers' talk in school/on a school trip over the past four years [question 31]. Of this figure, more than half of students (56%) said that these events focused on practical apprenticeships (which significantly co-relates with the recent shift in government focus, noted in the literature review) [question 32].

- **Finding 17:** Approximately 34% of respondents said that they would choose higher level mathematics for the Leaving Cert [question 34]. Of this number, 92% said that their decision was influenced by the incentive of bonus points [question 35].

- **Finding 18:** Given the choice, 87% of students (calculated from 62 respondents) said that they would rather choose to study subjects which they find most interesting, in general [question 39].

- **Finding 19:** Just 3% of students said that they didn't know which subjects they were most likely to choose subjects for the Leaving Cert [question 24]. However, 40% of students said that they didn't know which subjects they were most likely to pursue after school [question 26]. Similarly, 30% said that they didn't know which field they were most likely to pursue as a career/job [question 27].

6.4 Data Reflections

Although the discussion of research findings will take place in the next chapter, it is appropriate here to provide some contextual clarity and to briefly reflect on the findings that were drawn from the empirical study. The data presented in the foregoing sections comprise twenty-five out of forty questions that were posed to the research participants on the questionnaire in total. As previously indicated, ten of these questions were designated as being 'key' in advance of the questionnaire, while a further twenty produced data that was determined to be 'significant' after the study had been completed. The data derived from these questions was further sub-divided into numbered findings (1-19), which will henceforth be referred to in their abbreviated format e.g. F1, F2 Etc. With this context in mind, it is worth briefly indicating the main conclusions which were drawn from these findings. Firstly, the findings indicated that students are motivated to learn for intrinsic reasons outside of school and extrinsic reasons in school [F1; F2; F3; F11]. Secondly, the data showed that this school places a mixed emphasis on teaching students to learn for extrinsic and intrinsic reasons [F5]. Thirdly, the project revealed that students in this school have been taught to learn for a mixture of extrinsic and intrinsic reasons [F6]. Next, the results demonstrated that students think that the most employable subjects in their school based upon their experience of learning are those which are in market demand, for reasons which are related to experiences of teaching/learning/curricular pressure i.e. Commerce/STEM/Practical Subjects [F4; F8; F9; F15; F17]. Subsequently, the analysis established that the majority of students who plan to choose higher level maths for their Leaving Cert are motivated by the incentive of bonus points, for reasons linked to points

incentive/market demand [F16]. Additionally, the investigation confirmed that students think that the most important subjects in their school based upon their experience of learning are those which are not in market demand, for reasons related to curricular pressure/personal interest and school/teacher attitudes i.e. Humanities [F7; F10; F12]. The study verified that students both hold a preference towards and were more likely to choose subjects for their Leaving Cert which are not in market demand, for reasons which are related to personal interest/individual strength i.e. Humanities [F7; F10; F12; F13; F14; F18]. It is important to mention here that the although the finding produced on employment skills [F7] may appear as a statistical outlier, it is not surprising. The reason why this anomaly exists is likely due to the fact that schools do not, in fact, teach students the technical skills required to gain employment, rather, they cultivate the attitudes; dispositions and outlooks which are necessary for the workplace. Finally, the research uncovered that despite holding a strong degree of certainty about the subjects they would choose for the Leaving Cert, a large number of students did not know which subjects or subject related careers they were likely to choose after school [F19]. Although this finding is inconclusive, it is worth considering the fact that there has been an exponential rise in the correlation between the number of students who choose these subjects in school and subsequently elect to pursue related career paths, as demonstrated in the literature review. The next section will compare participants' subject preferences for Senior Cycle, as indicated in the questionnaire, with their final subject choices for the Leaving Cert, which took place later in the academic year.

6.4.1 Subject Choices: Questionnaire Vs. Results

The empirical data presented above was collected in December 2019 before then being collated and analysed by the principal researcher over a period of four months. Two semesters later in

April of 2020, the pool of research participants made their final subject choices for Senior Cycle. Students entering this cycle were required to choose three subject options in addition to English; Irish and Mathematics, which are compulsory at this level. To achieve this process, students entering Senior Cycle were required to complete an online spreadsheet, indicating their desired subjects of choice, in order of numbered preference [Appendix B].

Below is a table (6.1) which represents the subject choices that students indicated they would make for their Leaving Cert in the original questionnaire, as compared to the final number of applications for each subject. For the purpose of clarity, this table also includes students' first choice subject preferences:

Table 6.1: Indicated subject choices

Subject Options	Indicated Subject Choices* [December 2019]	Final Subject Choices [1-3] [April 2020]	Numeric Increase	1st Subject Choice
Commerce	8 (11%)	22 (31%)	14	1
STEM	4 (6%)	70 (100%)	66	28
Practical Subjects	16 (24%)	40 (57%)	24	17
Humanities	27 (40%)	78 (110%)	41	24
Combination	14 (16%)	47 (67%)	33	N/A

*3% of students surveyed originally stated that they didn't know which subject choices they were likely to make for the Leaving Cert.

The table of findings shows that there was a numeric increase in the final choices made for each subject option available to students in the research pool, when compared with the answers which they provided in the research questionnaire. Overall, the final subject choices which were made by these students revealed that the greatest rise which took place was in STEM subjects, which experienced a 66% increase in the number of students who chose these

subjects. These subjects also accounted for greatest option which students listed as their first preference. By contrast, the data spreadsheet showed that there was also a 40% increase in the number of students who chose the humanities as their final subject choices. These subjects accounted for the second greatest option which students listed as their first preference. Both commerce and practical subjects also experienced an increase in the number of students who opted to choose them, with a combined rise of 38%. The final spreadsheet also showed that there was a 33% rise in the number of students who chose a combination of options when it came to their final subject choices.

Table 6.2: Final subject choices

This table provides a simple breakdown of the number of choices made for each subject category:

Subject Options [April 2020]	One Subject Chosen:	Two Subjects Chosen:	Three Subjects Chosen:	Total Number of Applications:
Commerce	22	0	0	22
STEM	54	15	1	70
Practical Subjects	33	7	0	40
Humanities	47	28	3	78
C/S/P Total:	**109**	**22**	**1**	**132**
Humanities Total:	**47**	**28**	**3**	**78**
Nearest Ratio:	**11:5**	**7:9**	**1:3**	**12:7**

This table of findings shows that the humanities were the subject category that received most demand from students with 78 total requests. These subjects also represented the category which received the most requests for two options [out of a possible three] The subject category

which was in second most demand were STEM subjects with 70 requests. While commerce and practical subjects received a combined demand of 62 requests from students. View collectively, Commerce, STEM and Practical Subjects [henceforth 'CSP subjects'] received a combined total of 132 requests from students. By contrast, humanities subjects received a combined total of 78 requests from students.

Table 6.3: Breakdown of subject choices

This table provides both a percentage and ratio breakdown of the choices made for each subject category:

Results:	Indicated Subject Choices [December 2019]	Final Subject Choices [1-3] [April 2020]	Percentage Increase	1st Subject Choice
C/S/P Subjects:	28 Students (41%)	132 (188%)	(147%)	(65%)
Humanities:	27 Students (40%)	78 (110%)	(70%)	(35%)
Combination:	14 Students (16%)	47 (67%)	(51%)	N/A
Nearest Ratio:	1:1	5:3	37:18:13	2:1

This table of findings shows that there was an overall statistical increase of 147% in the number of students who chose CSP subjects, when compared to the original choices which were indicated in the study questionnaire. By contrast, there was a 110% increase in the in the number of students who chose humanities subjects, when compared to the original choices which were indicated in the study questionnaire. With regard to the order of subject preference, the analysis showed that 65% of students listed CSP subjects as their first choice, while the remaining 35% of students chose humanities subjects. A ratio analysis of these statistics showed that there was a 2:1 breakdown in favour of CSP subjects versus humanities subjects when it came to the order of student preference with respect to their first choice path of study.

6.4.2 Anticipated results Vs. Overall Findings

This section will briefly compare whether the data gathered confirmed or deviated from the anticipated results listed earlier in the chapter [Section 5.4.1]. Overall, the final outcomes indicated that:

1. The data **confirmed** that the majority of students in this school recognized a school bias towards certain forms of subject learning during their three years of Junior Cycle completion.

2. The data **confirmed** that students recognized a clear market demand for the same types of subject learning, based upon their employability during their three years of Junior Cycle completion.

3. The data **confirmed** that students were more likely to choose subjects for their Leaving Cert which had received extra attention; which they believed to be the most employable, for both overall subject choices (5:3) and first subject preference (2:1), despite indicating otherwise on the original questionnaire. The final ratio of Commerce/STEM/Practical Subjects vs. Humanities as the first subject preference of students was marginally higher than 2:1 (65% vs. 35%).

Viewed concurrently, the findings drawn from the empirical data appear to show a positive co-relation between the New Junior Cycle and students' perceptions of learning. This correlation aligns with both the national trend outlined in the literature review and the anticipated results outlined earlier in the chapter. As indicated at the beginning of the chapter, the findings are mildly surprising, given that the site in question is a voluntary faith-based school, rather than an ETB. The next chapter will present the data which was generated from the methodological research process which was completed alongside the student researchers.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings of an empirical research study, conducted by a teacher and five students, using a co-operative approach to research inquiry. This study aimed to gather the requisite data necessary to answer the first of two final research questions of the thesis. For this reason, the empirical study inquired into TY students' perceptions of learning under the recent Junior Cycle, in order to ascertain the extent to which this reform may have affected their views and subsequent decisions about their future educational choices. Upon review, the findings drawn from the research study appear to confirm the hypothesis set out by the principal researcher in relation to the impact of the Junior Cycle curriculum reform upon students' perceptions of learning. As demonstrated, an analysis of the first set of data drawn from the pool of research participants showed a strong co-relation between the hypotheses formed about New Junior Cycle curriculum in the literature review and students' perceptions/educational choices in St. Michael's College. The next chapter will detail the role which the student researchers played in this project and how their involvement generated the data necessary to address the final research question which the thesis hopes to answer.

Chapter Seven: Research Findings – Working with Student Researchers

7.1 Introduction

Building upon the last chapter, the purpose of this chapter is to address the second of two remaining research questions, which is:

- Could an applied Freirean approach to pedagogic inquiry assist students in recognising any assumptions or bias which underpin learning in schooling?

This second question will serve as an important focal point when looking at how co-operative inquiry was approached with assistant researchers. In particular, it will be pertinent when considering the line of questioning which was employed in the interview transcripts and worksheets completed with these students. In order to frame the empirical aspect of this study, the next section will begin with by detailing how these students were chosen for the study and the training which they undertook as part of the project.

7.2 Student Participants

It is helpful here to remind the reader of the names of the student researchers who volunteered to participate in this this project. The details of these individuals are provided in the table below:

Table 7.1 Student Research Profiles

Name	Age	Gender
Brian	Fifteen Years Old	Male
David	Fifteen Years Old	Male
Damien	Fifteen Years Old	Male
Richard	Fifteen Years Old	Male
Tim	Fifteen Years Old	Male

Further details about each of these student researchers is provided in the individual vignettes afforded to each, later in the chapter. The next section will outline the research timeline that was followed for this empirical study.

7.2.1 Research Timeline

The following research timeline was followed throughout the duration of the empirical study until its completion. As previously indicated, this timeline represents a modified sequence of completion, which was made necessary due to the unforeseen events detailed in the research methods chapter. The original timeline for this thesis may be viewed in the appendices attached at the end of this thesis [Appendix C].

Table 7.2: Research Timeline

Academic Year	2019
Month	**Activity**
September	- Study gatekeeper selected upon request. - Student researchers selected on voluntary basis. - Consent letters issued to parents/guardians of all participants. - Consent letters completed and returned. - One week grace period enacted.
October	- Student researchers complete induction. - Student researchers complete study questionnaire.
November	- Student researchers complete post-survey interviews. - Student researchers undertake minor research training in research methods and data collection. - Student researchers complete first research exercise.
December	- Student researchers complete second research exercise. - Student researchers collect data for the empirical study.
Academic Year	**2020**
January	- Transcription of study questionnaires completed by the principal researcher.
February	- Collation and organization of data completed by the principal researcher.
March 2020	- Preliminary data analysis completed by the principal researcher. - Preliminary findings generated by the principal researcher.
April 2020	- Remote training in data analysis provided to the student researchers. - Student researchers complete third research exercise.

	- Student researchers complete remote analysis of preliminary findings.
May 2020	- Data analysis is completed.
	- Student researchers provide feedback about their experience of study involvement.

The next section will outline the responses provided by the student researchers to the study questionnaire which was completed at the beginning of this timeline. This timeline may also be referred to for all events which are described hereafter in this chapter.

7.3 Questionnaire Responses

This section will present a selective account of the answers provided by the student researchers to the questionnaire on their experience of schooling and the Junior Cycle curriculum reform. Responses will be presented from five key questions taken from different stages of the questionnaire (beginning; middle and end) to give an overall sense of the student researchers' views toward learning in general and their experiences of learning in schooling [Appendix E]. As in the previous chapter, the term 'key' in this context refers to that data which is deemed to be most germane when answering the final research question stated at the outset of this chapter. Responses to other peripheral questions provided by the student researchers will also be set out and elaborated upon in the post-questionnaire interviews that are presented later in the chapter. It is anticipated that the data generated from these questionnaire responses and later post-questionnaire interviews will serve two purposes, namely:

- It will act as a clear record of what the student researchers' views are in relation to their experiences of learning in schooling and why they hold these views.
- It will act as an important frame of reference in determining whether or not the student researchers' views have changed by the end of the research study.

It is important to note here that the responses presented in this first section do not represent the totality of the student researchers' perspectives, but rather, are designed to provide the reader with an overall sense of what each research participant believed before the study commenced. Following completion of this questionnaire, a more comprehensive inquiry into the research participants' beliefs was undertaken through a series of a post-questionnaire interviews. These interviews sought to elicit greater detail from the answers which the student researchers provided to key questions, as well as to obtain further supporting information about their views. These interviews also provided the student researchers with an opportunity to expand upon or revise their original answers and to ensure that their views were not misconstrued. An overview of the participants' responses will be outlined in the next section, which presents their answers to a series of questions that were asked in the follow-up interview. Viewed concurrently, this joint approach to inquiry forms a strong composite of the beliefs held by the research participants.

The first question which was completed by the student researchers inquired as to why they think people learn in general outside of school e.g. improving at hobbies such as football or piano. This question was designed to prompt the participants to consider why people are motivated to learn outside the remit of official educational settings. The student researchers provided a mixed range of responses to this question, which may be broadly categorized as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for learning. For example, Brian thought that *'...people learn for a lot of reasons, they love to learn and in most cases they love the subject, they want to learn something new or they want to prove someone wrong/prove a point'*. Similarly, David believed that *'...there are different reasons: to impress others; to prove you can; you have genuine interest in it or you get something in return'*. Inversely, Damien posited that *'...it might aid them in a future career such as practicing the piano can help while pursuing a career in music'*. In this way, the opening question established a general premise upon which to build

further inquiries about motivations for learning within formal educational environments. The views of student researchers may be compared against their peers, the majority of whom (81%) indicated the belief that people learn in general for intrinsic reasons.

This foregoing premise naturally led to the next question, which asked participants why they think people learn in school (e.g. doing homework; completing the Junior Cycle/Leaving Certificate). Responding to this question, three of the student researchers alluded to an absence of choice in the matter, while two others indicated that learning in schooling helps people to choose a career path in later life. These two positions are best captured in the words of Brian who objected that schooling *'...is required by law and people are too scared to speak up'* and Tim who said that *'...if you don't take part in school you will have no clue what you want to do, or be when your older'*. The views of student researchers may be compared against their peers, the majority of whom (79%) indicated the belief that people learn in school for extrinsic reasons. Linked to this response, the questionnaire later asked the student researchers whether or not they had noticed any extra attention given to certain subjects in school, based on their importance in getting a job e.g. being told that some subjects are more likely than others to help you to get a job than others when you leave school. In response to this question, all five of the student researchers indicated that they had noticed a curricular weighting toward certain subjects in schooling, in relation to job acquisition. The views of student researchers may be compared against their peers, the majority of whom (86%) also said that they had noticed extra attention being given to certain subjects in school, based on their importance in getting a job. Specifically, three of the participants felt that they had experienced been steered toward STEM subjects. Conversely, another participant noted a preference toward commerce subjects, while the final participant indicated that they had heard positive dispositions being afforded to a combination of several subjects. The views of student researchers may be compared against their peers, the majority of whom (55%) said that they had noticed extra attention being

afforded to Commerce Subjects; Practical Subjects or STEM subjects in school based on their importance in getting a job. Building upon this line of inquiry, the questionnaire later asked participants to state in which subject a qualification is most likely to help a person to get a professional job/career after school? [E.g. a certificate/diploma/college degree resulting in a skilled profession]. The purpose of this question was to ascertain whether or not the student researchers could recognize the connection between those subjects which they had experienced a bias towards in schooling and current economic demand for employment in these subject areas. It was noted that none of the participants directly tied the link between their experiences of subject bias in schooling and existing demand for this learning in the labour workforce. However, two of the participants [Brian and David] consistently chose the same responses to these questions (i.e. The subjects which they had experienced a bias toward in school were also the same subjects that they felt were most likely to help people to get a professional job or career in [STEM and Commerce]). Finally, when later asked in the questionnaire why they think a qualification in these subjects is most likely to help a person to get a professional job or career after school, Brian suggested that a qualification in STEM would be most employable because these subjects *'...are considered hard and more professional jobs use i.e. scientist, physicist etc'*. While David said *'...all subjects involving the bank or a career in business can lead to a steady career in my opinion'*. Thus, it is noted here that although these two boys were consistent in their responses, they did not make any reference to the economy or professional demand for such learning. Equally, the three remaining participants did not make any such connection between economy and learning. This was indicated by the fact that their answers collectively suggested that a qualification in any subject is equally likely to help people get a professional job or career. When asked in the questionnaire why they thought this, each participant offered a different response. For example, Damien suggested that *'...most jobs require a mixture of all the [subject] categories as they need to be flexible'*. Richard opined

that *'...People are motivated to do what they want, if they have the determination to do something, they'll do it'*. Lastly, Tim argued that *'... a qualification in all the subjects can get a person a job as a teacher, in all [therefore], English, Maths and Irish [are] the most important'*. The views of student researchers may be compared against their peers, the majority of whom (76%) thought that a qualification in Commerce Subjects; Practical Subjects or STEM were most likely to help a person to get a professional career/job, either because these subjects were generally employable (42%) or because of market demand for these areas of learning (34%).

7.4 Student Interviews

Following completion of the questionnaire, the student researchers' answers were reviewed and select responses were chosen for further exploration. This selection was again determined by those responses which most closely aligned with the research question. Subsequently, the student researchers were asked to participate in an audio recorded interview in which they were asked these follow up questions on their questionnaire responses. The aim of these interviews was to afford each participant the opportunity to expand upon their original answers and in so doing gain insight into the rationale behind each students' response. The next section will present excerpts from interview responses with the student researchers' post-questionnaire.

7.4.1 Interview Responses

The excerpts presented here are framed in order to provide the reader with an indication of the overall outlook which each student researcher had towards learning in schooling, drawing from their experiences over the course of a three-year period. To achieve this characterization, the student researchers' responses will be presented in the form of short individual vignettes which will assist the reader in understanding the personality and views of each person. Mainstream indicators of each student's academic ability (attendance; grades, etc) have been intentionally

excluded, as their inclusion may bias the reader's perception of the individuals in question. However, in order to provide the reader with some level of insight, it is worth noting that during the research process, the students' year head had anecdotally remarked that all five participants exhibit the disposition and maturity of university students. Where necessary, the original questions and responses provided by each student, which prompted follow up questions, will be indicated. The follow up questions that were posed to the participants in the post-questionnaire interviews were determined in relation to their apparent significance in answering the research questions listed above. Therefore, the term 'significant' in this context can be understood to mean that it appeared to affirm or challenge traditionally held beliefs about learning in schooling. It is important to note here that in the vignettes to follow, the student researchers were asked a varying amount of follow up questions and that these questions were not necessarily the same for each person. The reason for this disparity is that it was not the intention of this data to measure the student researchers against one another as a collective group. Rather, the aim of the applied methodological process described below is to assess the consciousness raising effect of this process upon the student researchers at an individual level by the end of the study. Further responses from the post-questionnaire interviews will be drawn upon again in the next chapter on discussion findings. Complete transcripts of each post-questionnaire interview can be found in the appendices included at the end of the thesis [See Appendix E].

Vignette 1: Brian

Brian is a fifteen-year old male who lives nearby to the school. He has regularly attended an extra-curricular philosophy club which is run by the principal researcher in the school for the past two years. He is a reserved person by nature but has visibly grown in confidence since joining the research group. He now asserts himself with more authority than before amongst

his peer group and exhibits a precocious maturity when engaging in subject related conversation. In this post-questionnaire interview, the principal researcher followed up on fifteen questions from the questionnaire, to which the participant had provided an original response which were deemed to be significant. For the purpose of brevity and individual characterization, only a select number of these responses will be presented below, in order to give the reader a clearer insight into the participant and their outlook toward learning in schooling.

When asked if he thought that learning in school should be required by law [implied in original response], Brian said *'...I think it should still be somewhat required by law...but I don't think there should be specific subjects that everyone has to learn no matter what. I think there should be a bit of leeway with what people can and cannot learn and what that choose to learn or what they choose not to'*. When asked if he thought people should speak out against imposed learning, he responded *'...I think they should, it is just that, there has been such a definitive way of life for so long people are just accepting well this is how it has been for so long we might as well just stay with it. We might as well just not try to change it'*.

Drawing from his questionnaire response, Brian indicated that his main motivation for learning in schooling was to get good grades so that he could get a good college course and by extension, a career or job. When asked why this was his main motivation for learning, he replied *'...I don't think there is any really other reason to do it, it is just like when I complete school I have to try and get a college degree or just wait to get a job to live my life and there is nothing really more I can do after that. There is not really more I can do other than that'*. Linked to this response, he acknowledged that a variety of motivations may exist, when asked what he thought incentivises his peers to learn in school. In his own words, he said *'...certain students have certain motivations, some do it for the same reason I do, some do it just because they have to, others do it because they are interested in what they are doing. I think it is just there is a*

variety of reasons why anyone else would do it'. Building upon this line of inquiry, Brian was next asked what he thinks the purpose of schooling is, based upon his experience of learning over the course of three years. To this question, he answered:

> *I think in society it is just to prepare people of their careers or jobs cos you know if you get a job, cos like with society in general if you get a job you can pay taxes, you can work, you can work, you can do things like that is how society is run. That is how it works so that is usually what schools are for is to allow you to become a member of society.*

Having indicated on the questionnaire that he believed that schooling should provide a greater function than preparing students for jobs, Brian was asked to expand upon what he believed schooling should achieve. He replied to this question that:

> *When you leave school you get a job, some people they sort of feel like you just go to a job, work, go home, go to sleep, wake up and go to the job and it is like just a continuous cycle, but if you are taught to do things more than that and taught to be a good citizen and taught not to just do everything as told, I think it would be just a better way to teach people…I think that's what teaching should be about. No to be just someone who goes, does their job and leave, just pretty much school again but without learning. Like just doing work just so you can live in society. I think there should be more reasons that to just be able to live in the world we have created.*

Finally, when asked in what ways he had noticed extra attention being afforded maths in school [questionnaire response], he replied *'…maths I think is given a lot of attention since you are given extra points for doing higher level since it is considered normally a difficult subject but also it gives you a lot of options when you leave school… it is considered difficult and it actually gives you a lot more options for jobs'*. When asked about the ways in which he has noticed extra attention being given to this subject, he commented:

> *It is just the fact that it is given extra points. That means that people who make the exams and who decide what points certain subjects can get think that maths is so important and not only should it get the, that it should be like considered a really difficult subject it also gets bonus points for doing so, so considering I think it is the only subject that does that.*

In relation to his subject choices for Senior Cycle, Brian indicated that he was likely to choose a combination of subjects to study for his Leaving Cert i.e. a mixture of Commerce; STEM and Humanities. Building upon this choice, Brian's suggested that he would like to pursue a combination of subjects after school. However, at the time of interview, he had not yet decided which career route he would like to pursue.

Vignette 2: David

David is a fifteen-year old boy who lives nearby to the school. David has one brother, two years his senior whom the principal researcher previously taught before he completed school. Like his brother, David is a confident and assertive person by nature. He asserts himself with great authority amongst his peers and regularly assumes the role of group leader. He has also regularly attended an extra-curricular philosophy club which is run by the principal researcher in the school for the past two years. David is forthright in expressing his views and speaks in a very direct manner. In this post-questionnaire interview, the principal researcher again followed up on fifteen questions from the questionnaire, to which the participant had provided an original response which were deemed to be significant.

When asked why should he should get used to working hard for extrinsic purposes [See original response in previous section], David replied *'...I know there will be things for my job I won't enjoy or memorising things for anything else in life so just get used to being bored at some points'*. When asked what the main thing his experience of learning in schooling has tried to teach him was, he explained that in his view, teachers hold expectations for different students and adjust their approach toward each student upon the basis of their perceived ability. In his own words, *'...try and create a good citizen out of maybe a student who may show to be a bad one in the future...[in my case] the teachers are trying to get me to have good grades and preparing me for careers in the future'*. When asked to expand upon the extra attention which he had noticed being afforded to a 'combination' of subjects based on their importance in getting a job, he replied:

> *[It] looks like a lot of the commerce subjects are good for getting jobs in banks and stuff and STEM is good for getting jobs in either engineering or science so it is two different fields of work and the humanitarians can get jobs as teachers for any single one of them so I think any of them work, work for them. I don't think there is one specific one better than the other.*

When asked to elaborate on what type of pressure he has experienced in relation to making future subject choices in school, he replied that it depends *'...on what people you are talking to like from talking to a business teacher they will be trying to convince me to pick business as a subject or if I am talking to a relative with a job with something to do with medicine they will be kind of persuading me to maybe pick chemistry or biology'*. When asked why he thought a qualification in any subject was equally likely to result in a professional career [questionnaire response], he replied *'...if it is being taught in school you an get a job with it so I don't think one outweighs the other for a subject for a job'*. Lastly, when asked whether or not his decision to choose higher level mathematics as a subject choice for his Leaving Cert was influenced by the prospect of gaining extra points for attempting this subject, he confirmed *'yeah, because it is two more grades up...25 points [in terms of points awarded for attempting the subject at this level]'*. Developing this line of inquiry, David was asked how he knew about the points bonus, to which responded: *'...my brother did his Leaving Cert so it was kinda me just watching him doing it. So, I knew he did higher level maths anyway, so he did get the bonus points'*. At the time of interview, David, like Brian, had not yet decided which career route he would like to pursue. Thus, in relation to his subject choices for Senior Cycle, David indicated that he was likely to choose a combination of subjects to study for his Leaving Cert i.e. a mixture of Commerce; STEM and Humanities. David explained this choice by stating that he planned to game the system by choosing those subjects which he thought would be easiest to gain points in, rather than those which he had the most interest in. David's rationale for this approach was that he wanted to give himself the best possible advantage when it came to college applications in his final year, by obtaining as many points as possible. He again stated that he had learned this tactic by watching how his brother had approached the matriculation system and made subject choices accordingly.

Participant 3: Damien

Damien is a fifteen-year old boy, who lives slightly farther away from the school than the rest of his peers. He is an only child and stood out amongst the student researchers as being the most guarded in his disposition toward the principal researcher at the beginning of the research process. This attitude was indicated by his taut demeanour and laconic responses when engaging in casual conversation. Similarly, he appeared to be an outlier amongst the other student researchers both in terms of his role in the group and his relationship with them. Of the five student researchers, Damien is the only one who does not attend the extra-curricular Philosophy club run by the principal researcher. However, as the research process unfolded, he began to joke and reveal more of his personality, which included a penchant for rock music. The principal researcher later discovered [at a parent teacher conference] that there had been a rift in the peer group some months prior and this likely accounted for these abnormalities in his behaviour, both toward the principal researcher and the other student researchers. To my understanding, this rift was unrelated to the research study and was later resolved by the boys. In this post- questionnaire interview, the principal researcher followed up on eighteen questions from the questionnaire, to which the participant had provided an original response which were deemed to be significant.

When asked if all learning is job or career related [implied questionnaire response], Damien replied *'...well not all learning, obviously there are some types of learning say, kicking a football, something as mundane as that like even though that can be helpful in a career, in you know football, it's merely just something you can have fun doing'*. Developing this line of inquiry, Damien was next asked if there any other reasons why people might learn in school aside from career related goals [implied questionnaire response], to which he responded *'...No...it is as simple as what else are you going to do with that knowledge? Like, cos if you*

are not going to use in in a career then what is the point in possessing that type of knowledge?'.

Similarly, when asked if this was also how he viewed the purpose of his own learning, he affirmed *'yeah'* and also confirmed that obtaining a career/job was his main motivation for learning in school. Despite this line of reasoning, he confirmed that this was not what he believed the purpose of schooling should be, nor what his experience of schooling had taught him. Rather, he believed that the purpose of schooling in general was to *'create good citizens'* as this would make it easier for the Government to control *'public order'*. Moreover, he thought that schooling should perform a variety of functions which included creating *'...well informed people so that they don't choose say a political party that could ruin the government…to create good citizens because it is cheaper for public services (i.e. less vandalism) and… to [help students] get good grades in general cos the school should be in charge of well the child's education so you know that they are better off in life'*. Next, when asked why he believed his teachers think STEM subjects are the most important forms of learning in school [questionnaire response], he said *'...any teacher that is involved in maths, biology, chemistry, physics…[especially] my science teacher is always trying to say that well these are obviously more important to you than anything else'*. Subsequently, when asked in what ways he had noticed mathematics being afforded extra attention as a subject in his experience of schooling [questionnaire response], he observed that *'...there was no after school clubs for like English, there was no after school clubs for geography or history but there was but there was a club for maths every day in school'*. Finally, when asked why he thought commerce subjects were the most employable forms of learning, he stated *'...these ones are more employable because it is accounting, business studies and economics and that is pretty much what you need to have if you want to become an office worker like for firm or an insurance company'*. In relation to his subject choices for Senior Cycle, Damien indicated that he was likely to choose a combination of subjects to study for his Leaving Cert i.e. a mixture of Commerce; STEM and Humanities.

Building upon this choice, Damien suggested that he would like to pursue a combination of subjects after school. At the time of interview, Damien indicated that he would like to pursue a career route in the Humanities.

Vignette 4: Richard

Richard is a fifteen-year old boy who recently moved into a new home with his family in Northern Ireland. Richard has one younger sister who also attends the school. He is a sprightly character who often displays quick wit and quirky humour. Richard is casual in his everyday demeanour and speaks in a very upfront fashion. Richard has also regularly attended an extra-curricular philosophy club which is run by the principal researcher in the school for the past two years. In this post-questionnaire interview, the principal researcher again followed up on fifteen questions from the questionnaire, to which the participant had provided an original response which were deemed to be significant. When asked to elaborate on his original answer about the purpose of learning in schooling, Richard expanded:

> *So most jobs, like the song are from 9 to 5. I believe school is to get them into a routine of you leave your house early, you arrive back relatively mid to late in the day and if I were to be sprung into this out of nowhere, just say if school, were to be from maybe 12 to 4 or 5, I wouldn't exactly be use to waking up early then and I my sleep pattern for example would not be the greatest and I wouldn't get well rested so I believe that having people get up early gets them use to just typical jobs.*

When asked why he believed that STEM careers are more readily available than jobs in the Humanities [questionnaire response], he replied '*...from my knowledge there aren't really many jobs out there that eh other than teachers of course, that would entice, [example] geography... I don't see any of my parents or family members got anything to do with those humanity subjects so that is just my personal view of it'*. Following this line of questioning, Richard was asked about the ways in which he had noticed extra attention being afforded to STEM subjects [questionnaire response]. Similar to Brian and Damien, he observed that '*...it is mainly maths I have seen a bias towards... [whenever] I have asked the teacher sir or madam, "What situation would I need this in? And they have just been saying you will need*

it, it is really important but I have never actually got a direct answer'. When asked what he thought the primary factor motivating his peers to learn in school would be, he stated *'...getting a career or job from from the department which they are learning from... from what I have heard from my friends [and] its mainly what I have heard from them – 'oh I am doing this subject so that I can get some sort of job in that department'.* Lastly, when asked about his personal motivations for learning, Richard shared *'...I don't really care for money that much it mainly experience that drives me. I love learning new things and just applying that to real life. Just makes me enjoy it more'.* In relation to his subject choices for Senior Cycle, Richard indicated that he was likely to choose subjects based around the Humanities for his Leaving Cert. At the time of interview, Richard indicated that he would like to pursue a career route in STEM. When asked to clarify this apparent contradiction, Richard stated that despite preferring the Humanities *'...the one thing I am most interested in is computers... and that is most likely the career path I would choose [because] in my opinion I believe it is more difficult to find a career path in humanities'.*

Participant 5: Tim

Tim is a fifteen-year old boy who is an only child and lives in a home nearby to the school with his mother. By nature, Tim is a very reserved and shy person who does not speak much and often assumes a passive role both as a student during scheduled class time and during extra-curricular events. However, as the research training progressed, Tim, like Brian, appeared to relax and showed signs of being comfortable around his friends and the principal researcher. Tim has also regularly attended an extra-curricular philosophy club which has been run by the principal researcher in the school for the past two years. In this post- questionnaire interview, the principal researcher followed up on sixteen questions from the questionnaire, to which the participant had provided an original response which were deemed to be significant.

When asked whether or not he believed that going to school makes people intelligent [implied questionnaire response], he replied *'…well it will give us like a better idea when we get older, because when we are younger we just think we will be able to do it [things] straight away…but once we get into school we actually learn that we are not able to'*. Developing this line of inquiry, Tim was asked why he thought the purpose of school is for people to achieve good grades, so that they could in turn get a job or college course [questionnaire response], to which he responded *'…the teachers always say when it is coming up to the junior and leaving certs that you need to study, you need to study if you want to get good grades and get a good job or a good degree in college'*. Tim was subsequently asked what he thought teachers' motivations were for teaching, he replied *'…I think that they are just trying to help us get good careers in our lives…but they also want to try and help others just younger people and that and they just want to help us get good jobs and just make us well informed'*. Regarding his own personal motivations for learning in schooling, Tim cited various members of both his immediate and extended family several times throughout the interview, whom he either wished to please by achieving good test results or who influenced his thinking about career choice options. In relation to his subject choices for Senior Cycle, Tim indicated that he was likely to choose a combination of subjects to study for his Leaving Cert, specifically, a mixture of STEM and the Humanities. Explaining this choice, Tim clarified that he has a number of careers in mind which he may like to pursue after school which related to these subjects. At the time of interview, Tim indicated that he would like to pursue a career route either as a teacher of Biology/P.E. or in ship design.

7.5 Qualitative Research Training

Following their interview, the student researchers were each provided with blank copies of the questionnaire and asked to provide feedback on the document, so that changes could be made if necessary, for later distribution to other pupils as part of the empirical investigation. Having

reviewed the questionnaire, the changes recommended by the student researchers included changes to the layout of the document; modification of question wording and additional options made available for multiple choice questions. These changes were subsequently made to the questionnaire and student researchers' responses to all new and/or modified questions were re-recorded.

The next phase of the research involved providing student researchers with the necessary knowledge and skills to participate in the project. It is appropriate to re-iterate here that within the context of this study that the process of research training also forms part of the overall research findings recorded in the project. In order to acclimatize students to the study project and ensure that timeline deadlines were met, research training sessions were not audio recorded. To ensure validity, however, both scans of student research tasks [Appendix F] and PowerPoint transcripts of these training sessions [Appendix G] were kept for later reference and research purposes. As per the research timeline, the first research training session took place in early October, with the entire research team present. This session marked a symbolic transition of these participants from being the researched to becoming researchers themselves. The content delivered in the first session focused on the following areas:

- An overview of the research project itself.

- Establishing ground rules for the principal researcher during the project.

- Establishing ground rules for student researchers during the project.

- Provision of key terms

- Introduction to the concept of research.

- Introduction to research observation.

- Introduction to approaches to questioning.

- Introduction to data collection and analysis.

- Clear instructions and guidance on the ethical issues involved in the project.

- Research Task - Planning data collection for the research project.

As the research timeline indicates, training sessions were organized for the student researchers on a bi-weekly basis during which they completed mock exercises and learned techniques for observation. In accordance with the research methodology, the subsequent sections will detail how the principal researcher employed Carspecken's five-stage critical research methodology [CRM], using co-operative inquiry with the student researchers. As part of the training process, the student researchers were tasked with completing mini-observation tasks both at home and in school, in order preparation for applied field research. Written records of these observations were recorded and used as stimuli for further discussion at later research training sessions. All interviews; research training sessions and later discussions with student researchers took place in the setting of the principal researcher's own classroom.

CRM Stage 1: Data collection

Following the first research training session, student researchers were provided with observations templates and tasked with keeping a daily record of habits and routines of their household members for a period of seven days. The purpose of this exercise was to instil a sense social recognition within the student researchers by having them explore their own everyday realities in accordance with the first stage of the CRM model developed by Carspecken (1996). This exercise involved asking the student researchers to keep a record log of the routine behaviours carried out by other members of their household for a period of one week. The student researchers were directed to make a daily note of standard behaviours such as work routines, meal times and leisure activities. It was hoped that student researchers would be able to break away from the mundane nature of daily routine and think about the function of human behaviour by looking at their own reality through a new lens, e.g. 'Why do people behave the way they behave?' To aid this process, it was recommended that the student researchers assign each family member a pseudonym, in order to create a sense of objectivity

and to help them apply a research lens when at home. The use of pseudonyms for participants in this exercise served a double purpose, as it also protected the identities of those family members who were under observation. Permission was sought and obtained from the parents/guardians of all student researchers one week prior to the completion of this exercise.

The observations recorded by the student researchers were submitted in writing to the principal researcher one week later, so that they could be analysed for themes and patterns. It was also anticipated that these recordings may include personal circumstances or details which the researchers would not like shared in front of one another, which proved to be the case. As with all data inquiry, findings can often include details or information which is not the intended focus of the collection but which can prove relevant to the study at hand. In the case of this first research task, the observations recorded by student researchers offered an insight into the home lives of each person. Some of the peripheral data which emerged included student researchers' definitions of 'family'; different socio-economic backgrounds and other pressures or responsibilities which formed part of their lives. For ethical reasons, the outlying data noted above was not discussed with the student researchers.

CRM Stage 2: Reconstructive analysis

Following their submission findings from stage 1 to the principal researcher, the student research team re-convened two week later to discuss what they had learned from the home observation exercise. The purpose of this discussion was to analyse the primary record of data collection to identify evidence of potential patterns; routines and social relations in accordance with stage 2 of the CRM model. Rather than formally presenting the results of their work, the team instead opted to openly dialogue with students about what they had discovered through completion of this task. All student researchers were able to recognise a routine pattern, which governed their daily existence, which resulted from either individual habits or the circumstances of those around them e.g. arriving at school earlier than necessary in order to

accommodate a parent's work schedule. All of the student researchers were able to identify the patterns which existed in the daily schedules of those around them (e.g. having breakfast at the same time each day) and the end to which these means were conducted (attending school/work). Through analysis and discussion with the student researchers, it became apparent that the exercise had led them to reflect upon the behaviour of their family members and recognize how daily reality is structured in a clear and ordered way. For example, Tim noted on his observation sheet that his mother '…makes tea and puts it in a flask for work, except the days that she is late', while Brian observed that '…dad works late on his computer at night'.

CRM Stage 3: Data generation

The completion of the second stage functioned as a theoretical bridge to the next phase of the research model, which was for the student researchers to repeat the same observational exercise as before, but this time within the context of the primary research site (their school). The purpose of this exercise was for the student researchers to transition into their new role as 'inside observers' and to make note of any patterns; routines or social relations which they deemed worthy of recording, as per stage 3 of the CRM model. To this end, student researchers were asked to take broad observational notes about life in school on a daily basis over the course of two consecutive school weeks. By design, student researchers were not given any specific aspects of school life to look out for, except to record staff and student behaviour in the same manner as they had previously done in the first task at home. These observational notes were collected from the student researchers at the end of the first week, at which point they were given specific instructions for the second week of observation. The structure of findings gathered by the student researchers indicated that they correctly applied the methodological approach which they had learned in the first research task when asked to repeat the same exercise on site in the school i.e. the observations recorded by the student researchers took were descriptive in format and contained no additional conjecture or speculation which

revealed their opinions about what they had recorded. Through a thematic analysis of these notes, the principal researcher uncovered a focus on three clear aspects of school life, namely:

- Corridor behaviour vs. classroom behaviour;

- Routine order;

- Interaction with teachers

As the summary above indicates, the student researchers collectively highlighted many of the same features of daily school life, despite working separately from one another. Observations made about their peers included responses to bell chimes (unison movement); corridor behaviour in between lessons (horseplay and laughter) and how students speak to one another, as compared to how they speak with teachers (bad language vs. civil discourse). It was later agreed by the student researchers that these findings were typical accounts of daily school life and that there was nothing unusual about these experiences of schooling. It was concluded by the principal researcher that the outlooks presented by the student researchers toward their experiences of the school curriculum were normalcy and acceptance. This outcome was anticipated by the principal researcher for two reasons. Firstly, it was expected that student researchers were acclimatized to their social conditions, having rarely had the opportunity to compare this routine experience with knowledge of any other context for a prolonged period of time. This point was made by David when describing his experience of work placement during the year, '…in work experience the environment is so much different than school…however, I was only there for one week. How am I meant to know that they weren't making themselves look good for the week?'. Secondly, it is important to reiterate that the student researchers had been tasked with describing their daily experiences of schooling, not questioning them. Therefore, it would have beyond the student researchers' purview if they had immediately begun to recognize or question aspects of the systemic relations behind schooling at this stage.

<u>CRM Stage 4: Discovering system relations</u>

Building upon phases 1-3, the penultimate stage of CRM attempts to draw connections between the research site and power structures. To assist the student researchers in this process, they were directed to take notes about certain features of the hidden curriculum in schooling prior to their second week of field research. Specifically, they were directed to make observations about the following aspects of daily school life: school rules in action; school dress code, posters on corridor walls and student/teacher interactions. The purpose of this exercise was to compare this set of observational notes with those gathered by the student researchers after the first week and find out what they had discovered by themselves, as compared to their findings when given specific aspects of school life to look out for by the principal researcher. A thematic breakdown of the observational notes taken by the student researchers during the second week of this task was again undertaken by the principal researcher. This analysis showed that the student researchers had specifically identified the following additional themes in schooling:

- Domestication/Social control (Classroom rules)

- Positive vs. Negative reinforcement (School rules)

- Classroom design (Layout of Tables and Chairs)

When directed to identify and describe specific aspects of the hidden curriculum during a typical school week, the student researchers began to observe and describe features of their daily reality which they had previously accepted without question or overlooked. Tim wrote *'...I noticed posters for upcoming events e.g. if there is a treasure hunt on or promotions (such as the student bank)'*. Brian observed that there was *'...no hanging round the corridors at break'* i.e. students were not permitted to loiter in certain areas. Damien recognized that *'...most classrooms either have three rows of chairs from front to back with there usually being 3-4 chairs of separation [between them] or are in an 'E' shape. Both having chairs facing the board with teachers' desks facing the door'*. David added that during lessons there was both

'...formal language when showing a sense of interest e.g. asking questions and raising hands [but] swearing and speaking out of turn when not following work'. As hoped, some observations eventually went beyond descriptions of everyday routine and began to involve recognition of the interplay between schooling and wider social relations. As Richard detected in his notes *'...I assume they [rules] exist to ready the student for harsh rules at some jobs'*. When compared with the observational notes recorded by the student researchers after the first week, it is apparent that they did not extend beyond the descriptive i.e. how things are. However, when directed to record specific aspects of school life, the student researchers began to problematize their observations i.e. questioning why things are as they are. Evidence of this progress was indicated in those observations which alluded to the socializing function of school through behaviour, organization and rules.

CRM Stage 5: Explaining system relations

Building upon phases 1-4, the final stage of CRM is aimed at exploring the ways in which select system relations inform the particular site of study. To achieve this outcome, the student researchers were asked to complete a reflection sheet which was designed to elicit their views on factors which affect or influence secondary schools in the Republic of Ireland. The purpose of this exercise sheet [Appendix F] was to further assist the student researchers in identifying the role of schooling within wider society. By extension, it was hoped that they would begin to recognize the variables which determine what they learn; how and why. This exercise sheet represented the final stage of research training for the student researchers as it prompted them to reflect upon what they had learned from the first exercise (social routine at home); the second exercise (social routine at school) and consider how the observations which they had made reflected the influence of local; regional or national interests. Table charts containing the student researchers' written responses to this exercise sheet are provided below:

Student Researcher 1 – Brian

Factors which affect/influence secondary schools in the ROI	Schools are like [Analogy]:	Students are like [Analogy]	The reason I think this is:
- Money - Profit - Government - Parents - Children	Prisons because we have to walk to classes (cells). Staff leave for lunch (free time) and then we leave. The only difference is time.	Prisoners because if you cause problems you are punished and can sometimes stay longer.	It is usually taken as a joke but the more you think [about it] the more you see a correlation.

Student Researcher 2 - David

Factors which affect/influence secondary schools in the ROI	Schools are like [Analogy]:	Students are like [Analogy]	The reason I think this is:

- Other schools - Students - Board of education - Students and teachers - Exams - Primary schools	Hives	Bees	The queen bee (principals) wants all of the students to have the same goal of getting good results and sometimes they work together. The point is bees all have the same goal and they want students to too.

Student Researcher 3 – Damien

Factors which affect/influence secondary schools in the ROI	**Schools are like [Analogy]:**	**Students are like [Analogy]**	**The reason I think this is:**
- Students/Parents - Board of Education - Other schools outside the ROI	Factories	Products	That schools were designed to educate those that attend it – students – and they are only built for this reason. They think of students as more of what they can do for said factory.

Student Researcher 4 – Tim

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Factors which affect/influence secondary schools in the ROI	Schools are like [Analogy]:	Students are like [Analogy]	The reason I think this is:
- Board of education - Social media - Parents - Students - Other schools	Summer camps for students who like school.	School for them is like a break from home.	School is an escape for students wh maybe have parents who are arguing lot, or maybe separate, so school wo such as exam results [and] projec (online) could make parents wo together more and spend less tin arguing.

Student Researcher 5 - Richard

Factors which affect/influence secondary schools in the ROI	Schools are like [Analogy]:	Students are like [Analogy]	The reason I think this is:

- Board of Education - Parents' Committee - Building company - Revenue/money - Rival schools - Potential jobs	A bad summer camp. You don't want to go there but it can be fun at times.	Death row inmates. You do your work for at least six years and afterward you're disposed of.	You don't do much with school once you're finished.

The ostensive responses provided by the student researchers in relation to the third task indicate that the research training process was successful in its aim of preparing them for the main research task involving an empirical investigation of TY students. This is evidenced in their ability to identify patterns of social behaviour displayed by their classmates and link them to a variety of social factors which inform the way that schooling is organized. It was hoped that these student researchers would employ the skills which they had subconsciously developed through the research training and exercise in order to later devise; carry out and analyse the results of a research questionnaire completed by their peers.

7.6 Student Research Investigation

Having provided the student researchers with rudimentary training on data collection and analysis using Carspecken's 5 stage CRM model, a plan was formed to conduct the empirical investigation. Following a discussion with the principal researcher about the research timeline, the student researchers proposed an approach to data collection which was both feasible and pragmatic. This plan involved collecting data from the entire research pool en masse during a block class period prior to the Christmas exams, subject to approval of school management. The student researchers suggested this proposal as TY students do not sit winter exams in the

school and such a plan would not therefore interrupt their scheduled teaching and learning. Following discussion about supervision and timing requirements, this plan was approved by the school management. In total, seventy students were surveyed during a single forty-minute period under the supervision of three classroom teachers (including the principal researcher). Instructions for the questionnaire were written on a whiteboard at the top of the room and orally communicated to participants in order to limit any misunderstanding. Student researchers were also tasked with clarifying any questions which participants had about the questionnaire during the data collection process, in student friendly language. The questionnaires were both distributed to and collected from participants by the student researchers at the beginning and end of the allotted time period. Subsequent to data collection, the completed questionnaires were kept in a locked storage cabinet within a locked office in the school for a period of five days, before the research team next had an opportunity to meet and continue the next phase of the research. Before data analysis could take place, it was necessary to transcribe the answers provided in each individual questionnaire, in order to convert participant responses into data which could be explored for generative themes and/or quantified in a statistical format. Subsequently, a research break was taken [as per the study timeline], which afforded the student researchers a respite, while the principal researcher undertook the task of transcribing, generating and analysing the statistical results which drawn from the research study questionnaires.

7.7 Quantitative Research Training

Following a provisional analysis of questionnaire results by the principal researcher, a PowerPoint training exercise was devised to furnish student researchers with the necessary skills to interpret statistical data at a rudimentary level. This training exercise was framed around a hypothetical town in the United States ['New Bark Town'], which loosely resembled the actual context in which the empirical research was taking place [Appendix G]. The student

researchers were provided with a nominal amount of contextual information and related statistics about life in this town since the 2008 recession. These statistics pertained to aspects of life which were both banal (such as grocery shopping and pet ownership) and which subtly related to the empirical study at hand (the impact of international businesses on local employment). The student researchers were then asked to develop inductive responses to questions which were presented to them about the lives of people in this town. For the purpose of brevity and relevance, only those questions which related to the study at hand will be included below. These questions were as follows:

- If 70% of the population in New Bark Town work with computers every day, what do you think this tells us about the type of work which is in demand?

- Where do you think the demand for this type of is coming from?

- If a particular type of work is in demand, what implications could this have for people who are not interested in/qualified in that area of work?

For the purpose of relevance, the student researchers' the responses presented below will be limited to questions those which resembled actual themes in the empirical study [a complete version of these responses may be viewed upon request].

Response 1: Brian

1) Computer jobs seem to be in high demand due to this research.

2) I think it [the demand] comes from the number of big businesses coming in after the crash in 2008.

3) It would be a lot harder for them to find a job, they might even have to move so they can find a job.

Response 2: David

1) This tells us that there is a large amount of work that involve working inside in offices, banks and other jobs that would require computers. This shows that this type of work is in high demand compared to other areas.

2) My hypothesis is that New Bark Town was originally a quite rural town but after the economic crash of 2008 the several international businesses that set up offices in New Bark Town created jobs that raised the demand for jobs that involved computers.

3) With such a high demand for jobs in the area of computers this is not great for people lacking any knowledge on computers or who are not interested in this area. This makes it more difficult for these people to search for a career that does not involve this area of work in New Bark Town.

Response 3: Damien

1) 70% of the town has education or experience with computers telling us that the most emerging businesses in the town are mostly dominated by technology related work.

2) The demand is most likely coming from business related areas of work, since most of the processes have been advanced to computer-based platforms.

3) Those that don't have qualifications in the area of work would have to either seek out work for more menial jobs or if there is no work that fits with what they are capable of doing in the town, they would have to either commute to another adjacent town, or just seek out training in the available educational facilities.

Response 4: Richard

1) I'd assume that computer work would be in demand.

2) I assume [demand comes from] out of town businesses since it's cheap to set up.

3) This would mean that they have to move out of the town to find work that better suits them.

Response 5: Tim

1) Marketing skills, human resources, management and policy skills are in demand.

2) Businesses which set up in the town after the 2008 recession.

3) A negative impact due to a lack of training in this area of the workplace.

7.8 Co-Operative Data Analysis

Task 1

Following the successful completion of their quantitative research tasks, the student researchers were provided with a document of statistical findings drawn from the questionnaires completed by their peers. Accompanying this task, the student researchers were also sent a PowerPoint attachment, containing two final exercises for completion [Appendix H]. The first exercise contained a bespoke set of questions about the data, which carefully related to the research question at hand. The purpose of this task was to function as a form of corroborative assurance by assessing whether or the student researchers would interpret the data in the same way as the principal researcher. These questions were as follows:

Task 1 Questions

1.	Which subject categories did students think were most important? [See Q.16]
2.	Which subject categories did students notice extra attention being given to? [See Q.19]
3.	Which subject categories did students think were the most employable? [See Q.20]

4.	Which subject categories did students say they were most likely to choose for the Leaving Cert? [See Q.24]
5.	Which subject categories did students think a qualification in would be most employable? [See Q.29]
6.	Which subject categories did students actually end up choosing for the Leaving Cert? [See table included at the end of the questionnaire]

For the purpose of brevity, a select sample of the student researchers' responses to these questions will be presented below [a complete account of these responses may be viewed in Appendix I attached at the end of this thesis].

Task 1 Results

In response to the first question, Damien noted that *''...students thought that the most important subject group in the Junior Cert was the humanities group, with a combination of all of the subject groups coming in second''.* Replying to the second question, Richard mused that *''...students noticed extra care put into STEM subjects, I believe this has got to do with the government wanting people to be employed in this sector of work''.* Responding to the third question, Tim observed that *''...21% said they thought STEM subjects are the most professionally employable''.* Answering the fourth question, Brian recognized *that ''...38% said that they were most likely to choose humanities subjects for the Leaving Cert''.* Addressing the fifth question, David stated that *'...the jumps in percentages in the answers for this question are pretty close together. The highest jump in the entire question is between the highest (STEM subjects with 21%) and second highest (Practical subjects with 16%) with only a 5% difference'.* He further added that *'...my reason to believe that the answers in this question are so close together is if you have a good qualification in any area of subjects taught at school*

there is an opportunity to be employed in that area'. Building upon the foregoing answer, in response to the final question, David stated:

> B*ased off their subject choices from December of 2019, it's clear that a large number of students favoured humanities over the other three options. I would say based off the December 2019 results it's not surprising that a large number of students picked humanities however I would say the jump in interests in the other subjects are extremely surprising in some cases. I find that the jump in interest in commerce subjects makes sense as it's not that big of a jump but the jump in practical and STEM subjects are strange but not impossible. In 2019 6% of students favoured STEM subjects were as 38% favoured humanities. I find this strange as in 2020 when students choose their subjects 36% of students chose STEM subjects as their first choice and another 36% choose humanities as their first choice. I find it strange that 36% of students choose a STEM subject as their most wanted choice where as in 2019 only 6% indicated interest in this area.*

In view of these sample responses, a succinct overview of the success of this task will be presented below, in relation to its objective.

Task 1 Findings

Several findings were compiled following the completion of the first task in relation to the research question at hand. Firstly, it was observed that all five student researchers recognized that the majority of their peers thought the humanities were the most important subjects. Secondly, it was noted that all five student researchers recognized that the majority of their peers noticed extra attention being given to STEM subjects. Thirdly, it was established that all five student researchers recognized that the majority of their peers thought that STEM subjects were the most employable. Next, it was demonstrated that all five student researchers recognized that the majority of their peers were most likely to choose humanities subjects for their Leaving Cert. Furthermore, it was shown that all five student researchers recognized that the majority of their peers thought that a qualification in STEM/practical subjects were most likely able to get a person a professional career after school. Lastly, it was demonstrated that All five student researchers recognized the sharp increase in final subject choices for non-humanities subjects, as compared to the subject choices originally indicated by students.

Task 2 Questions

Following the completion of the first task, the student researchers were presented with a series of screenshot images taken from a variety of newspaper headlines pertaining to demand for subject choices in key areas of Irish second and third level education [Appendix G]. The student researchers were then asked to answer a series of questions based around these images, which required them to form both inductive and deductive responses. The objective of this task was to test whether or not the student researchers could recognize a co-relation between the key areas of subject demand indicated in the images and the subject choices made by their peers in the questionnaire data. The questions presented to the student researchers were as follows:

1.	Which three subject categories have received the most Government attention since the 2008 recession?
2.	Why do you think the Government has given extra attention to these subject categories?
3.	According to the CAO figures, which three subject categories have the majority of students been choosing to study since the 2008 recession?
4.	How do you think the attention given to certain subject categories in school might influence a Junior Cycle/TY student's decision about making subject choices for their Leaving Cert?
5.	What message do you think this sends to students about those subject categories which receive less attention than others?
6.	What connection, if any, do you see between the subject categories which the Government has given extra attention to and the subject choices which students in our school made for their Leaving Cert?
7.	In your opinion, how has the New Junior Cycle shaped students' views about learning in our school?

For the purpose of brevity, a select sample of the student researchers' responses to these questions will be presented below [a complete account of these responses may be viewed in Appendix E attached at the end of this thesis].

Task 2 Responses

In response to the first question, Damien observed that *'...STEM, Commerce and Practical subjects were the groups that the government has given more attention to since the 2008 recession'*. Answering the second question, Richard replied that *'...I personally think that*

funding was given to these subjects because the government thought that these subjects would be highly employable and would bring a great amount of money to the economy'. Responding to the third question, David answered *'...since 2008 the majority of students have been choosing Commerce, Stem and practical subjects. This could be for a number of reasons including personal interest, better courses, more employable or more profitable. I'm not sure if the numbers were similar before the recession in 2008 but with the government clearly favouring these subjects, I'm sure there's an influence'*. Replying to the fourth question, Brian suggested that *'...giving more attention to certain subjects will convince JC students to pick these subjects for the LC'*. Addressing the fifth question, Damien postulated that *'...a student in the Junior Cycle or in TY might see the growing demand for a career in these three subjects, STEM, Commerce and Practical, they would be pressured into picking those subjects to concerns about their future and won't be able to seek out what they might enjoy'*. Reacting to the sixth question, Richard said that he had *'...noticed a connection that the subjects that have gotten extra credit are also the subjects that most students have chosen'*. In answer to the final question, Tim concluded *'...in my opinion the New Junior Cycle has shaped students in a way the Government secretly wants them to be shaped. I mean [the principal researcher' had us do a PowerPoint Presentation not too long ago*, specifically on 'Free Will' that asks us if we are truly free, or just some mindless minions. To be honest looking at this New Junior Cycle whoever chooses these subjects I believe that the Government wants their own personal money makers'*. In view of these sample responses, a succinct overview of the success of this task will be presented below, in relation to its objective.

*This exercise formed part of a taught Philosophy module designed by the teacher as part of the school syllabus and was not related to the research project.

<u>Task 2 Results</u>

Several findings were compiled following the completion of the first task in relation to the research question at hand. Firstly, it was ascertained that all five student researchers recognized that non-humanities subjects had received the most attention since the 2008 recession. Secondly, it was established that all five student researchers inferred that the reason for this extra attention toward non-humanities subjects was linked to a pecuniary incentive for the Government. Thirdly, it was shown that all five student researchers recognized that there had been an increase in the number of students choosing to pursue non-humanities subjects since the 2008 recession. Next, it was demonstrated that all five student researchers recognized that affording extra attention to these subjects could influence the subject choices which students make in school. Additionally, it was proven that all five student researchers recognized that affording extra attention to certain subjects could have a harmful effect on those subjects which receive less attention. Furthermore, it was determined that all five student researchers recognized the co-relation between the subject categories which the Government has given extra attention to and the subject choices which students in our school made for their Leaving Cert. Finally, it was uncovered that all five student researchers concluded that the New Junior Cycle attempts to shape students' views about learning in schooling. More specifically, all the student researchers [with the exception of Brian], specified that the New Junior Cycle attempts to shape students' views about learning in such a way that they choose subjects which benefit the Irish state economically.

7.9 Project Reviews

Following the empirical study, a project review document was distributed to the student researchers via the study gatekeeper for anonymous completion [Appendix J]. This review afforded the student researchers an opportunity to safely disclose what they had learned from participating in the project as whole; how it affected their views of learning in schooling and how such a study might be improved if it were completed again. For the purpose of brevity, a

select account of the student researchers' experiences will be presented using a combined mixture of figures and quotations [See Appendix J for full transcripts]. In accordance with both the mode of inquiry and the objective of this project, the data chosen for inclusion below was determined using two criteria. Namely: 1.) Data which best showcases the student researchers' experiences of participation and 2.) Data which most closely relates to the final research question that the project hopes to answer. As this feedback was submitted in the form of anonymous review, it will be referred to in an abbreviated form [AR 1-5]. Further data from this review will be drawn upon in the next chapter on the discussion of research findings.

As this project was framed around the methodological approach of co-operative inquiry, it was important to inquire about the extent to which the student researchers had felt included in the research. When asked this question, all five student researchers stated that they had felt fully included in the project, with most specifying that this inclusion took place in an authentic and meaningful way. In the words of one student [AR 2], '…of course, he always asked for our opinions and always asked for feedback on how he could make things easier to understand, I really felt like I was an important ally to the team'. When asked what they thought the principal researcher wanted them to learn by participating as a researcher in this project, a number of consistent replies were given. All of the student researchers felt that the didactic role of their inclusion was to equip them with the sociological/philosophical skills to perceive and question reality in a new way. The sole outlying response to this question [AR1] said that '…I think he wanted to learn our perspective on the research question. This allows him to get more input'. Building upon this line of inquiry, the student researchers were next asked what the main thing was which they learned from participating in this project, generally. In response to this question, the student researchers gave a variety of answers about what they had learned generally, which ranged from statistics [AR 1]; the difficulty in sticking to a research road map [AR 2]; suspicion of Government [AR 3]; the imperfections of schooling [AR 4] and the

relationship between curriculum reform and student subject choice [AR 5]. Next, the student researchers were asked what the main thing [if anything] was which they had learned about schooling [specifically] through participation in the project. In response to this question, three of the student researchers said that the main thing which they had learned about schooling through participation in the project was about how Governments structure schools in such a way that it benefits them financially and/or the Government can appear suspicious in a number of contexts. The remaining respondents respectively said '…I was always aware that some subjects were more employable for future careers, but this project made me pay far more attention to the subject throughout the entire year' [AR 1] and '…I learned how much schooling means more to others than it ever has to me' [AR 3]. Departing from this line of inquiry, the review survey presented the student researchers with a bespoke excerpt describing human capital theory [through a neo-Marxist interpretation]. Drawing from this excerpt, they were simply asked to respond to the question 'what do you think about human capital theory?'. Due to the length and detail of the individual responses to this question, they will be looked at in detail in the next chapter. However, it is sufficient to note here that all of the student researchers expressed the opinion that this theory is, or could be true and in the case of some responses, assumed a negative outlook toward the implications of this concept. When asked about what advice they would give to the principal researcher, if we were to complete another project together (and/or what they would do differently), a variety of different responses were provided. Notably, one student [AR1] suggested that a wider approach should be employed to determine which student researchers are interested in participating a project, rather than being chosen based upon their relationship with the teacher. Similarly, another student [AR 5] commented '…I would advise him to pick a smaller group so there is less waiting on others'. One other point of recommendation [AR 2] was '…to try to think of some of the questions from a student's point of view (e.g. is this question easy to understand?)', while two other

student researchers strongly inferred that no changes would be necessary. The final question posed to students on the questionnaire asked 'has participation in this project changed how you view schooling in any way?'. Responding to this question, all five student researchers confirmed that participation in the project had changed the way they view schooling. More specifically, two of the student researchers said that the project had changed how they viewed schooling in a negative way; two stated that it had changed their view but failed to specify how, while the remaining student stated positively that '…it has shown me that some areas of schooling are actually not that bad, and pretty fun to do'.

7.10 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to address the second and final research question which the thesis sets out to answer, namely, whether an applied Freirean approach to pedagogic inquiry could assist students in recognising any assumptions or bias which underpin learning in schooling. To this end, the chapter detailed how a process of co-operative inquiry between a team of teacher-student researchers was employed using Carspecken's (1996) five stage CRM model. Specifically, it described how the student researchers were trained and tested before conducting a real empirical study, alongside their teacher, in the role of principal researcher. It was hoped that through this process of joint inquiry, the student researchers would learn to recognize and question the assumptions and biases which underpinned learning in schooling. Drawing from an original set of data generated by their peers, the student researchers unanimously identified the same connection between these two phenomena as the principal researcher. Following the successful recognition of this cause and effect relationship between the New Junior Cycle and their peers' opinions/decisions, the student researchers similarly inferred the same motives for this curriculum reform as the principal researcher. Furthermore, the foregoing conclusions were further corroborated by the student researchers in a post-research questionnaire, wherein their anonymous reviews and comments added further strength and success of the study, with

specific regard to its design, execution and subsequent outcomes. In light of these findings, it is therefore possible to positively affirm the guiding theory which underpinned the final research question. Namely, these results suggest that a Freirean approach to pedagogic inquiry can assist students in recognizing any assumptions or biases which underpin learning in schooling. These conclusions will be unpacked in further detail in the next chapter on the discussion of research findings.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis set out to frame both the theoretical and empirical aspects of the research project through the narrative lens of ideology and curriculum. The first two chapters of the thesis provided a starting point for this narrative by exploring the theoretical link between these two concepts within Western schooling in the last century. The third chapter showed the evolution of Irish schooling and curriculum design in tandem with ideological shifts that took place within a wider European context over the past thirty years. The fourth chapter outlined the theoretical framework which was used to inform both the thesis generally and the research study in particular. The fifth chapter detailed the methodological approach which was used to explore the influence of recent ideological shifts within an applied school context. The sixth and seventh chapters presented the data which emerged from the research project and how it compared to the results which were anticipated. Building upon these developments, this chapter sets out to discuss the findings which were drawn from the empirical research project, in conjunction with the literature that was reviewed earlier in the thesis. Through this discussion, the researcher hopes to make further sense of the data which was analysed, by framing it within the context of the immediate socio-political conditions of wider society. The aim of this discussion is to produce a cohesive synthesis of data which can be used to address the research final questions which were set out in the opening chapter of this thesis. The chapter will then conclude with a final section which returns to the theoretical origins of the thesis, namely, critically pedagogy. In order to begin this discussion, the next section will attempt to unpack the findings relating to students' perceptions of learning, based upon their experiences of schooling. This foundation should allow for a smooth transition to subsequent sections in which the empirical research findings will be theorized in greater detail.

8.2 Students' Perceptions

This section will attempt to address the penultimate research question of the thesis by discussing the findings that emerged from empirical research project which inquired into students' perceptions of learning under curriculum reform. This section will be claim that these findings form part of a previously established national trend relating to curricular bias towards subjects which are in economic demand. Evidence for this claim will take the form of both statistical data and written responses recorded by participants in the research pool. It is hoped that this piece of research will shed an important light on both the explicit and hidden assumptions which underpin curriculum development in Ireland, by demonstrating its impacts upon post-primary students' experiences of learning and subsequent learning choices.

Building upon the theoretical hypothesis which emerged from the first half of the literature review, namely, that students' perceptions of learning were influenced by curriculum reform, the next stage of the research sought to test this premise in the form of an empirical study. Through this study, the research set out to address the fourth research question which was established at the beginning of the thesis. To achieve this goal, a research team was established which consisted of the principal researcher and a small group of students. Following a period of research training and observation, this group of student researchers assumed a central role within the investigation. This research project built upon the findings of an earlier study which looked at the experiences of students who were in the process of completing their Junior Cycle (2006) and how this curriculum affected the pathway choices which they made for their Senior Cycle. Developing this concept, the study at hand looked at the experiences of students who had already completed their Junior Cycle and how it affected their subject decisions for their Leaving Certificate. Using a process of co-operative inquiry, the research team developed a plan to learn about TY students' experiences of curriculum reform. The crux of this research inquiry centred around the development and implementation of a questionnaire which was

subsequently distributed to an entire year group of students by the research team. The responses to this questionnaire were subsequently collected, imported into a live database and prepared for analysis. In order to ensure that a direct line of focus was retained, the participant responses were organized into a series of themes and sub-themes, using the research question as a guiding metric.

Following a provisional analysis of these responses, the first significant categorization which took place was the division of participant responses into intrinsic and extrinsic groupings. The justification for this classification stemmed from a discourse-based analysis of the text-based responses to the opening questions on the questionnaire, which offered an insight into students' motivations for learning both in schooling and outside of schooling. The questionnaire responses indicated that the participants were primarily motivated to learn outside of the classroom for intrinsic reasons (such as personal enjoyment) but sought extrinsic reward within schooling (such as exam results/career/jobs). This analysis led to the theory that students viewed intrinsic enjoyment and extrinsic attainments as separate outcomes when it came to their expectations of learning in schooling. This hypothesis was supported by further statistical data, which indicated that the majority of participants believed that the main purpose of learning was to help them secure a future career or job, rather than for personal enjoyment. This outlook was re-enforced through their experiences of curriculum reform which emphasised the notion that the purpose of learning is to gain stable employment in the form of a career or job. As one student [participant 8] succinctly remarked '…people learn in school to get the education for work after school'. For this reason, the participants in this research pool appeared to discern between learning for the purpose of enjoyment and learning for the purpose of future security when it came to their perceptions of schooling. This premise served as an important gateway toward further inquiry into students' experiences and perceptions of curriculum reform. The logic was thus: if students were largely of the opinion that the purpose

of learning in school was to get a job, then where was this outlook coming from? Could it be that curriculum reform curriculum form played a key role in embedding assumptions about the purpose of learning within schooling? Support for this theory grew when the majority of students later confirmed in the questionnaire that this is exactly what they believed school had tried to teach them during their three-year completion of the Junior Cycle [Finding 1; Finding 2; Finding 4; Finding 5]. Furthermore, it had been adduced from the literature that this curriculum reform was designed to favour those subjects which are important to economic growth and development. Therefore, it stood to reason that the research participants may have experienced a disproportionate amount of importance afforded to certain types of subject learning during their completion of the curriculum. Confirmation of this hypothesis came when the statistics showed that the research participants held a clear awareness of the subject areas which held the greatest market demand versus those which were less likely to result in future employment [Finding 8; Finding 9; Finding 10]. As one student [participant 64] observed '…people with STEM and commerce qualifications from prestigious universities are highly sought after by corporations'. While another respondent decried the fact that extra attention which was afforded to certain subject areas, over others. This person, [participant 51] neatly identified the problem with this wholesale approach to learning when they said '…I believe certain subjects have too much emphasis put on them like Maths, when there are other subjects that may be more important depending on the individual'.

Building on the above, it followed that if schools teach students to believe that the main purpose of learning is to get a job and implement structural biases towards certain forms of learning within the curriculum, then these factors may affect their subject or career choices. Following this line of reasoning, one further question arose in attempting to ascertain how curriculum reform impacted upon students' perceptions of learning. Namely, how did these structural biases within the new curriculum affect students' decisions when it came to making subject

choices for Senior Cycle? Looking at the evidence produced by the research questionnaire, it became clear that a direct link exists between the learning assumptions present in the Junior Cycle and the subject choices made by the participants in this study. According to the questionnaire results, almost half of students (49%) indicated that they would choose at least one Commerce; STEM or Practical Subject for their Leaving Cert. Equally, nearly half of students said that they would choose at least one humanities subject for Senior Cycle (48%). Interestingly, these figures differed when compared with the final subject choices made by these participants several months later. A comparison of these two data sets showed that there was a significant change in the number of students who elected to take each of these subjects for their Leaving Cert. In all, the number of students who chose the former subject categories rose to nearly two thirds (63%) of the total subject choices made. While by contrast, the number of students who chose the latter category of subjects decreased to little more than one third (37%) of the total subject choices made. Significantly, these preferences were also reflected in the order of subject choices chosen by students. It is important to note that an almost equal amount (65%) chose CSP subjects over the humanities (35%) when it came to their final Senior Cycle decisions. As a result, the research findings drawn from this questionnaire produced three key pieces of information which bore direct relevance to the penultimate research question. These findings show that recent curriculum reform has impacted upon students' perceptions of learning in the following ways:

1. Students learned to fundamentally view learning in school as an instrumental means towards extrinsic outcomes in schooling.

2. Students learned to recognize and accept that a market demand exists for certain forms of subject learning over others.

3. Students learned to make subject choices for their Leaving Cert in accordance with the structural dispositions of the New Junior Cycle.

Understood together, these findings help to paint a clear picture of the impact which the New Junior Cycle had upon these students' perceptions of learning. It was significant to learn that this reform plays an important role in shaping the views of young people when it comes to their beliefs about the purpose of organized learning in schooling. From an early age, students are schooled to accept and believe that the goal of learning in schooling is to achieve extrinsic outcomes, rather than to fulfil intrinsic ambitions. This assumption about learning is integral to the process of helping students to grow accustomed to the idea of working toward external objectives. The New Junior Cycle supports this paradigm by fostering a system of individual competitiveness, which is centred around key skill development in learning. These skills are designed to mould students in such a way that they are both pre-disposed to the concept of labour and have acquired the necessary characteristics to take on the demands of the modern workplace. These attitudes are re-enforced within schooling through a traditional series of rules and standards, such as positive rewards for good grades and negative consequences for lateness. Building upon this basis, it was argued that the New Junior Cycle also directly support market-driven demands for knowledge labour by endorsing certain forms of subject knowledge over others. Resulting from these biases, students learn to recognize which subjects are most likely to provide them with future security in the form of reliable employment. It is important to acknowledge that students do not live in a vacuum and by their own admission, draw stock from a myriad of other sources, including their friends, families and media. These influences play a significant role in developing their awareness of the economic conditions in which they live and how this relates to their educational decisions in schooling. Therefore, it is highly notable that a significant majority of students in this study opted to choose subjects which they knew to be in economic demand and which they had experienced a bias towards, rather than those subjects which they found most personally interesting. Thus, an important point of consideration here is to explore the possibilities around why so many students would pick these

subjects, aside from those who held a legitimate interest in those forms of learning and the career paths which they relate to. Relating these findings to the literature, one possible explanation for these choices is that many students succumb to institutional pressure which is placed upon them by in schooling choosing subjects which they have been led to believe are the most important. Looking at the questionnaire responses provided by students, it is evident that such pressures extend beyond the remit of schooling and may include social circumstances, parental influence or general uncertainty. A second theory might be that a greater number of students chose these subjects due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, which likely affected the way in which many students made decisions about their future careers (Irish Times, 2020). This is particularly apparent in times of economic uncertainty, wherein evidence from the literature review showed that many people turn to graduate and postgraduate courses in an effort to re-skill for the economy (Holborow, 2012). This hypothesis is evidenced by the fact that the majority of students recognized these subjects as being the most direct route toward financial security. Alternatively, such learning decisions may represent the safest choice for students who are uncertain about their future and want to keep their options after they leave school. One other possibility worth considering is that, some students, such as David [the student researcher], have learned to 'play' the system i.e. they choose subjects which they believe are likely to be graded more easily in order to uphold a national bell curve. This point is captured well in an anecdotal classroom exchange which was overheard between two students about subject choices, in which one stated '…it's so shit [the subject] but it's going to get me the points [for my Leaving Cert], so I don't care'. However, the wisdom of this 'give in to win' logic in schooling was questioned by another student [participant 56], who sagely asserted that '… some subjects are said to be more important than others as it is easier to get a job, but I believe in a happy career, not just an easy one'. This outlook neatly captures the

essence of philosophical zeitgeist towards which this research aspires when it comes to the ideal of education.

In relation to the literature set out in the third chapter, these findings go some way toward highlighting the role of ideology in curriculum development and the related impact of curriculum upon students' perceptions of learning. Notably, these findings show that there was a strong co-relation between the forms of learning which students had noticed a bias towards during their three years of Junior Cycle; those which they thought were the most employable and those subjects which they chose to study for the Leaving Cert. The findings data gathered in this study also form part of a broader national trend, which has witnessed a sharp uptake in particular areas of learning, backed by national and international market demand. As demonstrated, this demand has been imposed upon students through curricular initiatives in schooling, which are designed to mould students in the interests of market needs. Similarly, these reform initiatives also seek to instil a bias towards learning areas where there is a perceived skills gap in the market. This market-based rationale has resulted in a disproportionate emphasis being afforded to certain subjects over others within students' learning. This curriculum strategy reinforces both conscious and unconscious assumptions within their psyche when it comes to students' educational perceptions and decisions surrounding their learning. These findings support the critical literature surrounding the New Junior Cycle reform which have emerged since its introduction ten years ago. The conclusions drawn from this research study lend further weight to the claims made by both Mooney-Simmey (2014) and Printer (2020) about the economic motivations which underpinned the rationale for this reform. The data which emerged from the empirical study further adds to this literature by showing some of the direct implications which this reform has had upon students' experiences and perceptions of learning. In this way, the study demonstrated that there was a co-relation between structural biases within curriculum learning and the related choices which

students make about their futures. The study also provided evidence to suggest that students are more than passive actors within the context of schooling. This claim is supported by the fact that in the majority of students displayed an awareness of the social dynamics which at play when it comes to questions of why they learn and which subjects they choose in school. Ultimately however, the ambitions of students are of little importance in a learning context wherein they are perceived as little more than human capital within an institutional framework that stands as a structural beam in the support of economic interests. One final point that has been drawn from this study is that TY itself may play a more significant role than originally anticipated in determining the subject choices which students make for their Senior Cycle and beyond. The means to explore this possibility fall outside the time remit of this study, but may potentially open up an important avenue for further research in the future.

8.3 Co-Operative Inquiry

This section of this chapter will attempt to answer the final research question by reviewing the research methodology itself and unpacking the findings which have come to light about critically inspired approaches to research with students in schooling. This section hopes to forge a synthesis between the co-operative inquiry employed as part of the research study and the literature on critical ethnography outlined in chapter four. The overall implementation and success of this study will be compared against both the criteria set out in methodology chapter and the primary research question which the study set out to answer. As this is the first recorded project of its kind within Ireland's post-primary context, it is hoped that this study may go some way toward opening avenues of discussion towards future qualitative research within education.

This section will briefly review the application of co-operative inquiry as the chosen means of research methodology which was selected to achieve the aims of the empirical study. It will

discuss the importance of authenticity when it comes to the inclusion of students in the context of academic studies, while also challenging the perception of risk which continues to dominate academic discourse when it comes to unconventional approaches to empirical research. With regard to the application of co-operative inquiry as a means of investigation, it is crucial to acknowledge that this method could not have been considered successful if the student participants did not feel as though they had been included in the project in a legitimate way. Building upon the literature produced by Kellett (2005), it is fundamental to consider who benefits when it comes to the inclusion of students as researchers within academic studies. To employ students as a simple means to an end would only contradict the pedagogical merit which any such inclusion could hope to achieve. For this reason, it is important that the rewards of the research are extended to include the students who will be involved and that this inclusion is achieved in an authentic way. This thinking underpinned the design and implementation of the research project that was devised as part of this thesis. Had they felt as though the principal researcher was merely using them as a means to an end within the study, then this would have been antithetical to the pedagogical principles of the thesis. Therefore, it was critical that the assistant researchers felt that their voice was being heard throughout the project and that they were contributing positively to a study that set out to problematize the issue of learning in schooling. Furthermore, the anonymous reviews indicated that participation in this project proved to an enjoyable learning process for all of the student researchers. For example, one of the student researchers relayed that their participation in the research project was a highlight of their fourth year in school and gave them an enjoyable opportunity with their friends. As they [AR5] put it '…I have found this study to be [one of] the better things to come out of my year in transition year, it has been a wonderful time with the other members of the group'. This experience is representative of the indirect benefits which can result from collaborative research experiences between teachers and students. It is my view that these reflections should

be seen as a sign of encouragement within a system of highly conservative approaches to doing research in schooling. Although the ethical procedures required to gain approval for the study were time-consuming, they provided an opportunity for the student researchers to play a valuable role in both creating and validating the research findings. The insights which were gained from the completion of this study lend further support to the body of evidence collated by Kellet (2010) regarding children and research. While it is important to remain aware that students are not adults when setting research boundaries or work expectations, these factors should not be used as justification to opt against or dismiss this mode of inquiry. All research studies carry a degree of risk and bring conditions with them that must be accounted for when preparing both the methodology and working with students is no exception. However, when one accepts these factors as conditions of the research, it becomes much easier to overcome the potential theoretical drawbacks and recognize the more likely benefits in adopting such an approach. A similar perspective was posited by Yarwood (2008) who notes the reluctance to explore unconventional approaches to research inquiry within traditional academic discourse. In the case of this study, a joint research approach was employed critically in order to uncover and critique the abuse of democratic principles in education. This process was achieved by trusting in the same pedagogical axiom upon which most traditional approaches to teaching and learning rest i.e. the teacher-learner relationship. What demarcates this research study from most others involving children in schooling was my willingness as a researcher to invert this principle, by placing faith in my students in the same way that they do with me as their teacher. By accepting that the students volunteered to participate in good faith, it became far easier to trust in their ability as a group and to experience schooling their eyes. Equally, the student researchers retained an open mind and curiosity when discovering about what could be interpreted from the data which they had collected, in relation to society at large and the political undercurrents which shape their learning. In this way, I think that the process of co-

operative inquiry proved to be very effective in its purpose as a mutual process of discovery and should be viewed as a challenge to the dominant narratives surrounding empirical research.

8.4 Critical Ethnography

This final section of this chapter will return to Giroux, McLaren and the work of other Leftist theorists whose thinking relates to learning within schooling. However, Freire's work remains the foundation upon which many of these critical approaches to education have been built and will therefore be looked to at the closing point of this discussion. Outside of the immediate academic sphere, there is increasing evidence to suggest that social resistance is gaining ground, which is exemplified in the actions of individuals such as Greta Thunberg and groups such as Extinction Rebellion, who have showcased the types of active responses which are possible when young people learn to think and act critically. It is now hoped that similar forms of research can be implemented within Irish academia and schooling.

This section seeks to discuss how the application of critical principles within the empirical study contributed to the research methodology and their overall success in relation to the final research question. This question aimed to establish whether or not the assistant researchers involved in the co-investigation had learned to recognize any assumptions or biases which underpinned their learning, following completion of the study. To ascertain this information, it was necessary to identify what the student researchers had learned from participating in the study process and the conclusions which they had formed about resulted about TY perceptions of learning under curriculum reform. Evidence presented in the last chapter showed that these students were successfully able to identify some of the biased norms that were present in their peers' outlooks, resulting from their educational experience. These findings which will form the crux of the discussion in this section and will be further supported by excerpts taken from anonymous survey reviews with the assistant researchers at the end of the project. The

perspectives and conclusions which emerged from this co-investigative study will also provide an opportunity to discuss the overall success of the research method.

The empirical inquiry into students' perceptions of learning detailed in the last section established the foundation which was required in order to address the final research question of the thesis. This question aimed to establish whether or not the research methodology had been successful in achieving its overall aim. This methodology set out to elicit a sense of critical awareness from the students who volunteered for the role of assistant researchers within the study. To achieve this goal, a research design was devised which involved a co-investigative approach to the empirical project, working alongside a small group of student researchers. The decision to use critical ethnography provided a natural space to build upon the works of Freire (1970; 1973; 1998), Willis (1977), McLaren (1989) and others associated with the critical tradition. Given that only a thin body of literature exists on this subject, I am indebted to the work of Carspecken (1992), whose methodology was an invaluable guide in carrying out a piece of critical educational research which places the voice of the participant above all others. Reflecting upon the implementation of this process, it can be said that the chosen approach and design to this study allowed for a more natural, collaborative as well as mutually beneficial research practice. The survey reviews support the principal researcher's claim that the student researchers found the process to be beneficial in a number of very real and tangible ways, not least in terms of being able to reflect on the deeper meaning and potential impact of subject decisions in schooling. By prompting them to look more closely at their surroundings, these students learned to become critically aware of the hidden factors which shape their learning and the impact of this system upon others, as well as for them personally. By their own admission, the assistant researchers developed a new level of critical awareness through participating in this study. The timeline for this growth can be viewed in the responses which they gave in their interviews as study subjects, to the reflective diary entries and post-project

reflections they completed as researchers. For most of the student researchers, participation in the study was a revelatory process which gradually unveiled itself to them in stages from the commencement of the project, to the collection of data and subsequent interrogation of the findings. There appeared to be a moment of clarity amongst the student researchers when they realized that some of the assumptions which they had held about schooling were mistaken. The common point of understanding amongst all of the boys was that schooling is not a passive enterprise. Where they had previously assumed that schools operated as neutral conductors in the flow of society, it slowly dawned upon them that this was not the case. This moment occurred when they uncovered that the subject decisions which were made by the majority of their year group made formed a clear pattern. For example, as Damien observed '…students ended up choosing mostly STEM, commerce and practical subjects for their Leaving Cert'. The key learning point of the study took place when the assistant researchers discovered the forces behind this learning curve. As Brian recognized '…most students picked the subjects that the government gave priority to'. Thus, by looking at the choices and responses that were provided to them by their peers, the student researchers were forced to question any original assumptions they may have had the role of schooling on subject choices. For example, David conceded that he did not expect to witness a sharp rise in demand for certain subjects over such a short period of time. As he put it '…I would say the jump in interests in the other subjects are extremely surprising in some case…I find it strange that 36% of students choose a Stem subject as their most wanted choice where as in 2019 only 6% indicated interest in this area'. The significance of this pattern then became more apparent to the student researchers when it was later revealed to them that it corresponded very neatly to a national trend in learning. As the aforementioned student later concluded '…i'm sure the government favouring these subjects and giving them more attention certainly attracts some students to these areas when choosing subjects for the leaving cert and after leaving school'. Thus, the student researchers

learned that schooling plays a far more active role in the function of society than they may have previously considered. As a result, the assistant participants began to problematize their experience of learning, both as individuals within schooling and as researchers within the project.

Given the critical orientation underpinning this thesis, it is appropriate here to consider what the assistant researchers thought about the concept of human capital theory, when it was presented to them in the post-survey review. It is also an opportune moment to highlight that the student researchers did not experience any temptation toward confirmation bias throughout the project, as they did not learn about this theory after the study had been completed. As such, it is was interesting to note that the assistant researchers provided some insightful views on this concept in their anonymous reflections [henceforth, AR 1-5]. For example, one student [AR1] was able to relate this idea to their experience of the project, which was evidenced when they said '…I think the Human Capital Theory holds a large amount of truth. I still don't know what I want to do after school but I don't think I'll be unconsciously hypnotised to do what the government wants me to do, especially after doing this project'. This statement suggests that one of the student researchers was able to recognize and reflect upon this concept in relation to their own experience of learning. Another student researcher [AR2] felt reassured in their outlook toward schooling, when revealing that '…it's something I have thought about before in the past, I initially didn't think too much about the topic, but now I truly think this theory is being put in place all around the world today'. This remark indicates that some students actively think about their experiences of learning and hold different ideas about schooling. Next, a third assistant [AR3] expressed their willingness to consider the possibility of this concept, in saying '…I believe this theory could be true...everyone in the world is interested in 'money' and the government is the centre point for this'. This perspective shows an open-mindedness on the part of a student to accept that monetary interests play a role in schooling and curriculum

design. Interestingly, another student [AR4] considered how this theory might affect more than just pupils in schooling. He noted that '…the victims are not only the students but also the teachers who must teach these ideas even if they don't agree with them so they can make a living'. Looking back to the research rationale set out in the first chapter, this comment in particular resonated with me, as a it held a mirror up to my own professional experience as a classroom practitioner and motivations for beginning this thesis. Lastly, the final researcher [AR5] was angered by the idea that school curricula could be designed to attract corporate investment, rather than empowering students to achieve their ambitions. He neatly captured the sentiment of this problem in saying '…I think it's a vile thing for any government to pressure their youth into picking more profitable jobs for the government and business, they show no interest in the individuals' talent in other paths and only focus on servants towards the government'. This reaction suggests that certain students may be willing to engage and respond critically to scenarios which place them or their peers at a disadvantage.

As stated at the beginning of this thesis, the objective of the research project was not to instil any further biases within the student researchers against different forms of learning nor to change their minds about the respective subject choices which they planned to make. Rather, the project hoped to broaden their understanding of the role which learning itself plays both in and beyond schooling. For this reason, it was important that the students led themselves through this process of discovery as autonomously as possible, so that they could bear witness to the idea of schooling as an instrumental process, rather than it being a benign part of life's journey. This meta-layer of discovery prompted the student researchers to be intellectually honest with themselves and the principal researcher when looking at the data which they had helped to gather and interpret. This was an important pedagogical moment because it challenged the traditional learning dynamic which the students are product of i.e. learning as a something which is done to them in a passive capacity. By contrast, this praxiological approach

by empowering to become active investigators into the nature and function of organized learning. By inverting their experience of learning in schooling against itself in a gamekeeper turned poacher style-approach, the students were able to collectively raise their heads about the parapet and understand learning in a new light. This Hegelian turn (which forms a central tenet within critical theory) enabled the student researchers to invert the process of learning against itself, thereby producing a new synthesis of understanding about learning in schooling. It is likely that the researchers struggled to make sense of this process for a time, as they entered into the research project with a traditional outlook toward schooling and teachers. Thus, it is probable that they were surprised to realise that the purpose of the research project was not to re-enforce traditional perceptions of learning, but rather, to challenge them. Support for this claim is evidenced in the responses presented above, which appear to reflect the pedagogical depth that the research project managed to achieve in seeking to evoke a critical awareness in the students that formed part of the research team. This learning intention is best captured in the words of one of the boys [AR2] who anonymously reflected '…I think [the principal researcher] wanted us to learn to question if we truly have choice over our actions or is this just a set path made by the government'. With regard to the final research question, it can therefore be surmised that the decision to adopt a novel research approach imbued with critical underpinnings was successful in meeting its stated objective.

8.5 Critical Reflection

This section seeks to reflect on the findings which emerged from the research project as a whole through the lens of critical pedagogy. This outlook posits that it is the duty of the critical educator to challenge any perceived inequalities which they see within a system of education. Taking this approach and applying it to the findings that were uncovered through this empirical inquiry, it is apparent that a number of structural issues exist within the design behind the most recent curriculum reform in Irish secondary education. This section will focus on two specific

points of concern that were observed in relation to the New Junior Cycle from a critical standpoint. It will then will conclude by returning to the pedagogical roots of the thesis and reflecting upon the role of Freire in the critically-inspired design behind the research methodology.

The first point will consider the implications for freedom produced by the study results. Looking at the motivations which students held towards learning in schooling provides a window of insight into the nature of curriculum design in Irish secondary education. The majority of students stated that their motivation for learning in schooling is separate from their motivation for learning outside of schooling. Furthermore, the majority of students also claimed that in their experience, the function of schooling in society is to get a career or a job. Understood jointly, it is possible to infer from these responses that these students' rationale for learning in general is not necessarily the same as their rationale for learning career-based skills. This claim is supported by a study that was completed by Curran (2019) which found that TY students placed a strong importance on keeping personal interests separate to career interests. Resulting from this evidence, it follows naturally that the Junior Cycle plays a role in transmitting cultural attitudes to young people about learning and labour. Through this process students become accustomed to the idea that there are mandatory contexts in which they are expected to spend their time preparing for the workforce and separate contexts in which they are free to spend their time in pursuit of personal interests. This framework mirrors Althusser's (1970) description of schools as ideological state apparatuses which attempt to transmit the values of the state to students in schooling. The argument also echoes Graeber's (2018) theory about the workplace being the domain of production where people work because they have to and the workplace as the sphere in which value is created. He contrasts this setting with the home as the domain of consumption, where value is enjoyed and people engage in activities that they would be willing to do for free. The view that schools operate as adjunct institutions

in preparing students for the workforce is not a seminal discovery within the realm of education. However, this insight is being re-stated here because it factors into a number of as yet unexplained implications, when considering the exact types of labour which students are being readied for; who they benefit and how it affects their outlooks towards other academic pursuits. A number of conservative governments have gone to considerable efforts over the past decade to create an education system that can make Ireland a competitive force in the global economy. To achieve this objective, these governments have actively promoted certain types of subject knowledge in an effort to produce a workforce of labourers equipped with key economic skills. This educational strategy represents a clear agenda in terms of the vision for learning these governments have sought to grow in schooling with regard to function of the New Junior Cycle. In this way, it is claimed, the Junior Cycle curriculum reform is structurally wedded to the production of human capital for the international labour force, which serves as a lure for foreign direct investment. Therefore, the fundamental assumptions which underpin learning in lower secondary education are directly shaped by the logic of neo-liberal capitalism and so too are the students who complete this cycle of study. Recognizing the way in which this logic is infused, is central to understanding the attitudes the subject choices which were made by the research participants both in this study and nationally. This curriculum actively transmits the pedagogical assumption that the value of learning is to be measured in terms of career success, rather than intrinsic curiosity or personal development. The rationale for learning in schooling under this curriculum is characterised by the logic that if the subject knowledge can not be calculated in economic terms, then it isn't worth knowing.

The New Junior Cycle curriculum therefore has an adverse effect upon students by miseducating them about the object and purpose of education. The danger of this framework is evidenced by the fact that there has is an ongoing attempt to relegate subjects which do not yield economic reward and a related decline in the number of students choosing to study them.

From a critical standpoint, it is pedagogically negligent to create a framework for learning in which the needs and interests of the students are determined only in relation to their future efficacy as knowledge workers. Utilizing a curriculum in this way is entirely antithetical to the principles of democratic education, as it openly seeks to remove the freedom of its citizens by converting learning from a public good into a private commodity. In a word, the New Junior Cycle functions in a way so as '...to make the majority adapt to the purpose of the minority, thus depriving them of the right to their own purpose' (Freire, 1970). The current state of affairs in Irish secondary education demonstrates the power of the state as a politico-economic device, while at the same time illuminating the total absence of any thought or counter movement against this system within the arena of secondary education. It is therefore asserted that this curriculum represents a blatant attack on the nature of learning which needs to be challenged in the most serious terms. Some suggestions as to how this change might be achieved will be outlined in the next chapter.

It is appropriate here to return to the philosopher who inspired this thesis and whose works directly influenced the research methodology and design. An important question which arose for me as a researcher was whether or not the project had remained true to its Freirean roots. Underlying this process was his scheme for conscientization, wherein learners were presented with the opportunity to develop a deeply reflective, more critical relationship with the subject matter and their world. Upon reflection it is clear to see how Freire's (1972) emphasis on critical reflection; praxis and action played a key part in the realization of the research project. These aspects of his pedagogical method characterized the investigative approach which guided the research team throughout the study. Furthermore, the process of codification and de-codification of participant data were key to the success of helping the student researchers to identify themes and patterns within the curricular structures of the Junior Cycle (Freire, 1970). Perhaps the most prevalent aspect of Freire's (1996) approach evident in this study was the use

of dialogue as a means through which the team overcame traditional learning roles to work jointly towards a greater purpose. Thus, while the project may not have adhered to the traditional application of Freirean thought, it succeeded in its attempt to reinvent his work and maintain the legacy of critical pedagogy.

With specific relation to the aims of this research study, the co-operative process achieved its methodological goal set out in the by serving as an empowering process for students in a system which actively seeks to disempower them via a process of authentic inclusion. Finally, in keeping with my original commitment to the research and to the research participants, the dissemination of the research findings will in the first instance be used to inform the development of future TY programmes in St. Michael's College. Resulting from this research process, it is hoped that the publication of these findings may lead to improved policy and practice for future curriculum development in Ireland and farther afield. Further details about the proposed dissemination of findings and recommendations arising from the study are provided in the next chapter.

8.6 Conclusion

This study as a whole attempted to raise the consciousness of a student researcher group, by ascertaining whether or not they could recognize and question the assumptions underpinning the learning of their peers. All of the findings which have been presented in this chapter for discussion have provided insights into the Junior Cycle curriculum via the experiences and perceptions of Transition Year students in an Irish secondary school. These insights were subjected to a critical interrogation in an effort to both uncover the rationale behind this curriculum design and share this understanding with others. Resulting from this inquiry, there are two key points to make at this stage. The first point is that further research into the impact of curriculum design in Ireland is needed and that the analyses offered in chapters 3-7 should offer a starting point for doing such research. It is hoped that any further research into this issue

could be extended to include the perceptions of classroom teachers tasked with implementing the curriculum. The second point is that the research methodology and methods which were used in this research are largely absent in the literature surrounding the majority of research studies which take place in schooling. Doing research with children is unorthodox, and it requires a different approach to study design, but it also provides a more direct account of how learning is understood and perceived by those who experience it, rather than those who deliver it. By involving students active research methodologies, the results of future studies will hopefully shed light on how teacher activists might improve the teaching of children in Irish schools in future. Further details about how this might be achieved will be detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This conclusion will review the thesis by exploring the motivation for the research, summarizing the argument, reviewing research findings and relating them to overall aims and objectives. The conclusion then reviews the findings from the analysis in a way that relates them to the overall aims and objectives of the research. Next, the chapter will discuss limitations of this research and what might have been done differently had schools not been closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The conclusion will then explore the implications for education in its broadest sense, which can be drawn from the research evidence. As previously indicated, it should be noted that the term 'education' does not refer specifically to any structure of organized learning (such as universities or schooling), but rather to a philosophical ideal. Finally, a set of recommendations for future inquiry will be suggested based on this research.

9.2 Review of Argument

This thesis began by articulating the rationale behind Western education and the organization of schooling. With rapid changes in technology and economic ideology over the past few decades, there have been overt attempts from conservative governments to align the principles of education with international market demand, for universities and schools to define the aims of schooling in terms of skilled outcomes; to ensure assessment matches the features of the workplace and to make sure that universities contribute to a 'smart economy'. It was claimed that these changes have resulted in a number of shifts within Irish schooling, specifically in the way learning organized and taught at Junior Cycle.

Having clearly stated the rationale for the thesis, the second chapter began by providing an introduction to the key concepts of ideology and curriculum. These concepts functioned as a theoretical entryway to the issues highlighted in the first chapter and established a foundation upon which the thesis argument could be built and developed. This argument began by examining the relationship between these two concepts and how they evolved in Western schooling throughout the twentieth century. It was observed that curriculum development is comprised of several components, each influenced by the worldview of those who design them. Framing the argument in this way made it possible to show how theoretical ideas may be seen in the everyday workings of social institutions. This theoretical exploration provided a starting point to examine these ideas in the Irish context.

Following a general explanation of ideological development in Western education, the third chapter focused more specifically upon the evolution of secondary education within Ireland. This overview built upon the preceding chapter by showing how changes within Irish schooling mirrored wider historical trends in education when it came to both structural transformations and curricular objectives. To achieve this comparison, the chapter firstly presented a linear account of the changes which took place in Irish schooling, from its ecclesiastical roots in the nineteenth century to the growth of modernity following national independence and subsequent transformations since the turn of the millennium. Following this overview, the chapter next set out a timeline on which the evolution of secondary curriculum development could be tracked. The chapter then continued by charting the various curriculum reforms which have been introduced over the past three decades and their relation to the wider politico-economic climate. Having demonstrated how recent changes in Irish secondary education formed part of a wider international trend, this chapter concluded with a recommendation for an empirical inquiry into the most recent curriculum reform which has taken place in the Irish post-primary context.

The fourth chapter presented a theoretical framework for both the thesis generally and the empirical research project specifically. This framework built upon the argument which had been presented in the first three chapters by providing a critical lens through which the changes described in education and schooling could be understood. The framework outlined the history behind the school of thought which inspired this thesis and the related philosophical outlooks held by the researcher. These outlooks offered a critique of the structural hegemony which organizes and controls most aspects of Western society, including education and schooling. This position contends that schooling functions as a cultural mechanism which acclimatizes students to exploitative labour conditions through a system of outlook development and behavioural control. The chapter then explained how these philosophical ideas were later developed and challenged by a key thinker whose pedagogical teachings informed the research approach and design.

The fifth chapter detailed the research design, methodology and methods which would be used to explore the New Junior Cycle curriculum in the form of an empirical study. This study built upon the arguments which were set out in the preceding chapters by formulating a research hypothesis. This hypothesis claimed that the New Junior Cycle curriculum reform is driven by economic motives and promotes a subject bias towards certain forms of knowledge over others. Furthermore, it was claimed that one of the central objects of this reform is to generate a greater uptake in certain areas of subject learning, in order to produce a workforce that would attract greater foreign direct investment. To test this hypothesis, the empirical study set out to identify and analyse the perceptions and learning choices of Transition Year students in an Irish secondary school. This study served two main functions which related to the thesis research questions. The first function was to ascertain the extent to which these subject choices corresponded with national learning trends. The second function was to identify these patterns through a process of co-operative inquiry, involving student researchers. This chapter detailed

a plan for the collection of data, the transcription and analysis of that data and the approach to answering the study research questions.

The sixth and seventh chapters detailed the results from the empirical study in relation to the two main questions which the thesis set out to answer. Building upon the hypothesis established in the previous chapter, the findings from the empirical study showed that a positive co-relation existed between the subject choices made by participants and the statistics around national learning trends. Furthermore, an analysis of both the participants' responses and their subject choices indicated that the Junior Cycle reform had a direct influence on their perceptions of learning in school. Similarly, an analysis of the student researchers' responses to questions about the data showed that they were also able to recognize distinct learning patterns in their peer's subject decisions. This data analysis subsequently created an avenue to discuss the research findings which were generated by the empirical study.

The eight chapter explored the findings from the empirical study in relation to the literature from earlier chapters and considered this information in relation to research questions themselves. Beginning in macrocosm, it was established that there has been a history of politico-economic influence upon the Western curriculum development. Shifting then to the microcosm, it was shown that secondary education in the Republic underwent a series of significant structural and curricular changes over the past thirty years. Building upon this historical evidence base, it was then demonstrated that students' perceptions of learning had been influenced by the introduction of a new curriculum reform, which was evidenced in their attitudes towards schooling and related subject choices. Finally, it was shown that a co-operative approach to research inquiry can positively assist students in recognizing and questioning influences within their learning. Resulting from this discussion of findings, it became possible to respond positively to each of the research questions which the thesis set out to answer. This research discovered that it is possible to evoke a critical awareness in adolescent

students by involving them in applied research inquiry which focuses on their learning environs. This inquiry into the logic underpinning contemporary educational development revealed the adaptable nature of capitalism in its current neo-liberal stage of existence. Evidence surrounding these areas of discussion in education was already well documented within academic literature but was expanded through the original contributions made in this thesis. The next section will outline the contribution to knowledge which this thesis has produced and the significance of its originality.

9.3 Originality and Significance

The originality of this thesis lies in its attempt to apply the principles of critical sociology and apply to the Irish educational context. To achieve this, the researcher demonstrated how the neoliberal paradigm which shaped international educational policies also underpinned the reform of the Junior Cycle curriculum in Irish secondary education. Resulting from this discovery, the researcher set out to devise a research project which could assist future generations of educators and students in recognizing these knowledge biases within their learning. This approach was achieved by adapting the theoretical principles of critical theory and the pedagogical approaches of theorists such as Freire; McLaren and Carspecken. A review of both national and international literature showed that, with very few exceptions, the ideas espoused by these thinkers had only ever been applied in settings which involved the participation of adults. Stemming from this observation, a gap was identified in the research literature which could potentially be filled by involving secondary school students. This decision was based upon the perceived value which such research could add to the body of knowledge surrounding Irish secondary education; critical qualitative research and Irish curriculum policy development. The decision to adopt this research approach was justified for the following reasons:

- It challenges the assumptions underpinning curriculum policy development in Ireland by employing a critical research approach to data collection and analysis with students. While previous studies have been completed which included students in the research process, none of them have focused on recent lower secondary curriculum reform (Doyle, 2017; Curran, 2019; Alraddadi, 2020; Darmody, Lysaght and O'Leary, 2020). Furthermore, those studies which have involved lower secondary students have not done so from a critical perspective. This perspective is important because it challenges the fundamental assumptions which underpin curriculum studies in Irish secondary education. The decision to include secondary students in this process exposes one of the blind spots which exists in current policy development. It achieves this by highlighting the need for critical research into curricular experiences with students who have recently completed such learning cycles. It is only through such research that a more complete and student-centred approach to learning may be achieved.

- It adds to the literature on critical pedagogy by extending its principle tenets to the secondary classroom via direct action research with students. While some international studies have been carried out which involved critical approaches to research with second-level students, they did not include these participants in an assistant research position. This was an important point of difference because it casts light on the power gaps which continue to exist in critical research studies and highlights the need for further approaches to critical inquiry which enable current and future generations of students to shape the world they will live in.

- It adds to the educational literature on co-operative inquiry with children by providing adolescent students with the opportunity to participate in a critically designed research process. This orientation differs from traditional approaches to co-operative inquiry within educational research because it seeks to challenge, rather than support mainstream assumptions within learning. This strategy encourages students to think about and question their experiences

instead of fostering a passive attitude of acceptance. This rationale is important because it views students as agents of change, as opposed to being acquiescent recipients of information.

It was upon this basis that the researcher set out to devise a critical methodological research approach which could be realised with school children. Drawing upon the ideas and models of critical theorists, a qualitative model was devised which involved a social justice perspective that could be employed with students in a school-based context. As part of this model, a novel decision was taken to include student participants in the empirical study in the role of assistant researchers. At the time of undertaking, this research represented the first ever recorded attempt to involve school students as active participants in an empirical research doctoral study within the Republic of Ireland. This involvement included field observation; research training; direct field research and post-research discussion. The decision to include these students as research assistants allowed for a nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to the experiences and subject choices of students in Transition Year. If this approach had not been taken, it would not have been possible to discover the extent to which Transition Year students are cognizant of the wider socio-political factors which inform their learning and how these factors affect their subject decisions. By extension, without this research, it would not have been possible to fully ascertain the extent to which students may be considered independent actors when it comes to their learning decisions or how to gain further autonomy when it comes to the subject choices which they make in schooling. This study also succeeded in generating evidence, both statistical and anecdotal, of how wider, systemic changes have impacted on the development of second-level curricula in the Republic of Ireland. Resulting from this market-driven approach to teaching and learning, the next section will outline some recommendations for policy, practice and research.

9.4 Recommendations for Policy, Practice and Research

An alternative to the capitalist model of education is a system of learning which is built upon the Greek concept of Paideia. This concept refers to a broad cultural education is a system of value-based ideals centred around the concepts of human flourishment and civic development (Nikolakaki, 2012). This system begins with the person and seeks to develop the traits and skills which are necessary for them to contribute to society as an active citizen and work in a profession which is most suited to their individual desires and skillset. This premise for education formed part of the pedagogical vision outlined by both members of the Frankfurt School and later, Freire (1972) in place of capitalist approaches to learning. According to Freire (1985), the goal of education is to work toward a utopian paradigm through a system of education which treats human development as a formative process. As such, Freire (1996) advocated for a modern education system built upon the principles of paideia which would entail civic schooling and personal training. However, in order realize this goal, Freire (1997) argued that emancipatory action must be taken in order to change the present system and usher in a new model of learning. Therefore, in order to begin the transition towards this new model, urgent efforts are required to expose the systemic logic which characterizes the reality of learning under neoliberalism. To achieve this goal, further critical research is necessary to expose this system of exploitation and to promote alternative forms of education which are aimed at both individual freedom and civic development. Some suggestions for how this may be possible are provided in the sections to follow. The main recommendations arising from this study relate to three specific areas of Irish education. These areas are, curriculum policy development, teacher training, and further school-based research. These areas have been targeted for development because they represent three strategic areas underpinning the existing second-level curriculum. The first key area explores the theoretical principles which determine the framework and direction of the Junior Cycle Curriculum. The second area focuses upon the training which is provided to the individuals who are tasked with delivering this curriculum.

The third and final area examines at how future approaches to research inquiry could become more attuned to the voices of those who are the object of these policies, so that they may become subjects in their own futures.

9.4.1 Curriculum Policy Development

The first aspect of Irish public education which has been targeted for recommended change is curriculum policy, with specific regard for the motivations behind learning development. Research into issues pertaining to the market-based approaches to education have been ongoing for more than half a century, since the publication of Freire's seminal work (1972). Since then, there has been an abundance of critical literature produced which critiques the assumptions of profit-driven approaches to education and its implications for student learning. Much of this research discussed in the literature review focused on the problem that education functions as a direct economic pipeline for the international the labour market under capitalism. As a result, curriculum policymakers have become consumed by the rationale of learning for the economy and no longer question fundamental assumptions about the purpose of education. This logic has become socially embedded to the point that it is now accepted part of policymaking within education and a celebrated outcome of learning in the mainstream. However, what is lost is the autonomy of individuals to freely determine their own path in life. These insights close resemble the conclusions which were reached by Bowles and Gintis in their pioneering work about the shifting nature of education in the U.S.A. some decades ago (1976). Consequently, it has been disturbing to discover that the co-relation between learning and the labour force observed by these theorists, would prove to be eerily accurate and relevant in a contemporary Irish context.

Therefore, a key recommendation of this research is that those involved in educational policymaking and curriculum development and design within the Irish context commit to a more open engagement with the alternative voices of those who exist in the sphere of education.

At an official level, this would include dialogue with both oppositional and independent political candidates, who represent different economic perspectives toward education and labour. At a micro-political level, this would involve engagement with representatives of teacher unions (such as INTO or the TUI), the National Parent Council (NPC) and the Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU). While dialogue has been known to take place between these bodies, it is often unilateral and only takes place on matters that are in need of resolution, rather than involvement active policy development. Through such engagement, it might be possible to imagine a future in which the aims of future school curricula are not directly tied to the objects of economy. Such an approach to curriculum development aims at providing students with the complete freedom of choice to pursue areas that most interest them. This would mean that future generations of learners could make subject and career decisions free economically driven pressures within school or society to follow pre-determined learning avenues. Thus, at the level of curriculum, it is hoped that research which was produced as part of this thesis can contribute to looking seriously at the economic conventions which underpin the development of educational policy in Irish education.

9.4.2 Teacher Training

The second aspect of Irish public education which has been targeted for recommended change is both pre-service and in-service teacher training. While learning how to become post-primary teachers in schooling, it is crucial for pre-service teachers to learn more about the nature and purpose of education in schooling. The theorists outlined in the literature review should form part of the future coursework for all teachers and entail specific pedagogy methods classes on how to apply their ideas in practice. This would mean that subject pedagogy courses would include learning about the philosophy of education in general and pedagogical approaches that include both critical as well as liberatory perspectives. These theoretical perspectives should be embedded at the core of teacher training programmes and used to inform the active

pedagogical approaches of current and future practitioners. The object of these approaches is to empower teachers to overcome their role as cultural workers by actively practising democratic approaches to education with students. Building upon the work of Freire (1997) and Giroux (1992), it is proposed that teachers should assume a broader role as pedagogical activists, who seek to bring about change to the inequalities which they perceive to exist in their own social context. This role would involve active engagement with students about the issues which exist in their locale; what the sources of these issues are and how they could work together to change them. Teachers would serve as community ambassadors in this role and act as role models to their students for civic participation and protest. Examples of direct action which teachers could lead at a school level include how to introduce a critical element to student voice and advocate for minority views. While at a communal level, teacher activists could bring students to local protests; use social media to lobby politicians and demonstrate other forms of organized civil resistance.

The applied use of these perspectives could be taught at a general level, for non-humanities teachers, along with subject-specific lectures across the curriculum for teachers of the arts. Similar work could be done as part of in-service education for existing Irish teachers. The inclusion of these teachers would be particularly valuable, as their collective experience of curriculum reform could act as a key starting point for discussion around the future goals of education. Such work as being done by the Freire Academy for Critical Education (https://thefreireacademy.education/), an educational institute established by the researcher, which provides courses in critical theory and pedagogy to second-level teachers in the Republic of Ireland. Similar courses could be developed by institutions which provide teacher training programmes in Ireland or bodies such as this could be promoted by such institutions. This course work in teacher education could also be drawn from similar institutes in England, such as the Freire Institute in Burnley, which has existed since the mid-1970s. The work of this

institute encompasses teachers engaging in dialogue about prevalent issues within their own educational context to bring about generative themes and praxis for change. In doing this, teachers gain an understanding of the inherently political nature of education and learn how to bring about meaningful change in their own specific cultural setting.

9.4.3 School-Based Research

The third aspect of Irish public education which has been targeted for recommended improvement is school-based research. The findings from this thesis show that there is a clear void in the literature surrounding the curriculum experience of students within Irish schooling. Thus, it is strongly recommended that future curriculum inquiry is extended to include the experiences and voices of those for whom these school-based learning frameworks are designed. An example of such future research would include the dialogue which takes place on corridors, as well as classrooms. This would involve an exploration of the learning which takes place at other junctures in schooling, such as lunch breaks or school assemblies and how they impact on young people's experiences of education. Future research could be used to extend beyond the issues covered in this thesis. By design, this type of research would contribute to the goals of democratic education by seeking to understand the factors which prevent students from thinking and acting critically in schooling. For example, it could contribute to further understanding of how structural attitudes are taught; learned, and cultivated across the post-primary spectrum when it comes to issues of race and social inequality. Such research could also trial new ethnographic approaches or methodologies which seek to gather an 'emic' account of the experiences held by those who form part of the inquiry. This data could be collected using insider approaches to research, such as those which were included in the research study conducted as part of this thesis. In this way, a system of learning could be developed which includes the experiences of views of those who are most affected by structural inequalities within education. Such groups may include those who are economically, racially

or physically disadvantaged, as well as those who have hidden disabilities or experience gender dysphoria. Future curriculum inquiry could also be extended to include the perceptions of classroom teachers, who play an instrumental role in creating the everyday conditions which are experienced by those who they teach. Thus, extending the type of research conducted for this thesis to include the views of future practitioners on teacher training programmes could contribute to the development of teachers who take pedagogy seriously in their own and other subject areas. This type of inquiry in university programmes would be as significant as research in schools. The next section will outline some of the limitations of the research produced as part of this thesis.

9.5 Study Limitations

The limitations of this specific research project were not unlike similar studies involving research in schooling. One such limitation was the inclusion of a single school in the analysis. The original proposal for this thesis included a plan to distribute the same questionnaire to schools of different patronages and gender mixes within the immediate area and compare their results with those from St. Michael's College. However, given the level of time and analysis involved in looking at just one school, such an ambition, though interesting, would not have been feasible.

In terms of design, there are obvious limitations in a thesis that sets out to explore the impact of curriculum reform, but which focuses almost exclusively on the retrospective experience of students after they have completed it. Given time and further resources, the research which was completed would have undoubtedly been enriched by additional data which included the perspectives of those who are currently undertaking this curriculum at any point of the three-year cycle. On a related note, it is important to recognize that while this research explored the impact which curriculum reform had upon students' perceptions of learning, it was not possible to gauge the extent to which these outlooks were informed by other external influences, such

as families or friends. Thus, it is appropriate to acknowledge here that the study which was conducted is in no way comprehensive and that further research is required in order to fill such gaps within the literature.

One limitation that was specific to this study was the decision to include and work with student researchers using co-operative inquiry. Having outlined the benefits of such a research approach in earlier chapters, I think it is appropriate here to discuss some of the disadvantages of this method. Given the nature of the research involved, it is important that the welfare of any potential participants is considered above all else. For this reason, a considerable degree of effort is required to ensure that all risk implications have been considered in order to gain approval from an ethics board. Upon approval, a considerable amount of time is necessary to gain the agreement of all parties involved, including the joint consent of parents and students. In the case of this study, it took several weeks to ensure that all paperwork had been gathered and reviewed before any research could take place. Similarly, the conditions of the study meant that the research collection took longer than anticipated in the research timeline. Meeting with the students generally took place only twice per month, in order to guard their wellbeing and ensure that they were not subject to any unreasonable work demands in addition to their regular learning expectations. Additionally, research meetings with the student researchers occasionally had to be rescheduled due to extra-curricular commitments. For these reasons, the pace of the study could often prove to be slow, but as any doctoral student will know, spare time can be used efficiently elsewhere. Aside from these conditional restrictions, relatively few other limitations arose relating to the inclusion of student researchers once the study began. The notable exception to this was a research session when one of the boys did not turn up, as he was not speaking to the other boys due to an alleged conflict of interest on a personal matter. This served as a poignant reminder to me during the study process that despite their precocious ability when it came to the research project, that such maturity did not necessarily extend to all

aspects of their lives as teenagers. However, the boys soon resolved the matter amongst themselves and regular order was soon restored across the spectrum, including the research study.

The final limitation which arose during this study was the global pandemic that will likely dominate the direction of research within the academic humanities for decades to come. As a researcher working in a school, I was quite fortunate to have all of the data necessary for analysis collected, prior to the closure of schools on March 12th 2020, in the Republic of Ireland. Writing from a strictly professional point of view, the national lockdown period afforded me the time to attend to various aspects of my thesis, including the analysis of data. However, by the same token, these same circumstances also precluded the possibility of discussing this data with the student researchers involved in the study, due to school closure. As mentioned in chapter five, this approach would have involved further analysis of the original data by the student researchers, followed by one-to-one discussion about what they had learned from analysing the data.

Ultimately, I decided to circumvent these obstacles and bring the study to completion using digital technology. Specifically, this took the form of weekly e-mail exchanges in which the student researchers were provided with results from the survey analysis and then issued worksheets and related PowerPoint exercises to supplement their understanding of the data. Although functional, I would not have taken this decision as the principal researcher if I did not think that another option was completely viable. While this decision saved the research study, it did not enhance it and given the circumstances that were presented, it was not a complete choice. Had I opted to postpone the study until schools re-opened, it is unlikely that the student researchers would have been in a position to complete the research project, due to their Senior Cycle commitments. Under these circumstances, the decision to complete the study online became a necessary action in an effort to bring the research project to a natural

conclusion before the end of the academic year. Furthermore, I am quite confident that this conclusion to the empirical aspect of the co-operative approach would not have been as successful if it were not for the qualitative element and months of previous work which had taken place before the national lockdown was implemented for nearly six months. Therefore, I am disappointed that I did not get to realize this thesis as it was originally envisioned and for the students, who missed out on the opportunity to engage dialogically as a group about the potential implications of the findings which they helped to uncover. However, I take solace in the fact that a lasting pedagogic bond has been established between these students and I. This is the ultimate testament to the project's overall success.

9.6 Conclusion

Undertaking this thesis has been a deeply personal, transformative experience, which I had hoped it would be. By way of conclusion, I have chosen to end the thesis with a personal statement of what this process has meant to me and what findings or insights stood out. Upon reflection, I have a much to thank Paulo Freire for, as his work inspired me to undertake a long and fascinating journey, in order to gain a deeper understanding of my role as an educator in the world. Like many other educators, I found that encountering Freire came as a jolt to the complacency which tends to creep in when one becomes a classroom practitioner. Thus, in the spirit of both Freire and critical pedagogy, this process will continue to be a never-ending praxis, when it comes to questioning one's motivation and role in the classroom. Therefore, my journey will not stop upon completion of this thesis, but rather, its conclusion marks the beginning of what I see as a permanent, critical relationship to my practice. Without a doubt, this has been a most profound and deeply emotional experience, both emotionally, as well as intellectually. In particular, I will look back with fondness upon the insightful and occasionally moving dialogues which took place with the student research team. While it has been a very

worthwhile journey, it has been a difficult undertaking too, involving a great deal of time apart from friends and loved ones.

Perhaps the term 'anti-schooling' is too strong a word to describe my relationship with my practice post-thesis, but I cannot now consider the wider implications of what I do for a living or how I live. Reading Freire is to consider critically and deeply, the role of education in our society. Simply put, education is a political act, which is a fact that has ramifications beyond the classroom walls and for all educators, in all places of practice. In addition to Freire, one must also embrace the entire range of critical perspectives on education which emerged during the twentieth century and their implications for our society. The fourth chapter of this thesis explored the theoretical advancements of the Frankfurt School and their analyses of the modern world. The influence of their works can be seen in theoretical underpinnings and philosophical aspects of critical pedagogy as a field, in which Freire emerged as the most outstanding intellectual champion.

The work of Horkheimer and his colleagues helps us to understand the hegemonic characteristics of modernity and the impact which they have had for individuals in an era of late capital. I was particularly moved by the way in which the Frankfurt theorists demonstrated how modern life, under the influence and direction of capitalism, has resulted in an openly instrumental relationship between humanity and the world. It is not difficult to see how this continuum has, over time, pervaded all aspects of public life today. This rationale applies very clearly to education, which has become just another part of the 'culture industry'. It is evident that education is no longer something which the human races uses to make sense of our existence or our world. The purpose and role of education is now simply to either generate profit, or to profit from learning. Evidence of this agenda has been demonstrated through the supremacy afforded to the hard sciences at second and third level due to their potential to create competitive advantage for corporate institutions, at the expense of the humanities. This has not

gone unnoticed by Irish governments who continue to pour more and more funding into commercial research in order to attract investment from these trans-national corporations. Capitalism has become Gospel and STEM is its profit.

If I have reached one important conclusion from this thesis, it is that critical education should be concerned with exposing and resolving the most fundamental problems facing our society. My point here is that education should be aimed towards human freedom from the alienating structures and practices which shape our world and less about cultivating highly efficient human capital. By this I mean that we should aim to strike a balance between working to live and living to work; living, that is, in a world free from oppression, poverty and the crippling effects of climate change. The Frankfurt School members encourage us to undertake a critically disciplined approach when exploring role of education in society which is aimed at creating a more emancipatory vision and practice and for our world.

Critical educators work alongside, rather than on behalf of the disenfranchised groups whom they encounter, in order to cultivate a truly democratic learning relationship. It is only through a truly organic approach that real and lasting change may be brought about. Freire constantly warns against the dangers of laissez-faire style forms of pedagogy, which take place without any structure of theoretical insight. How many practitioners have actually taken time out to consider the nature and purpose of their practice? In defence of my colleagues, they are frequently overwhelmed with concerns about examinations, school meetings, marking and all of the other instrumentalism which dominates modern practice. Given these conditions, they have little or no time to consider what they do as teachers, never mind the reasons for it. This raises a question as to why serious critical perspectives on practice are not included in teacher-training programmes to begin with, as this would seem to be a natural place for such an intercession. Freire poses important questions to teachers, he challenges us to consider our motivations, our principles and the ethics of our practice. Reading Freire can be very

discomforting as it forces the educator to face difficult truths about both of one's profession and one's world. However, it would be wrong to adopt Freire wholesale without due recognition or regard to the other theorists and practitioners, such as Giroux and McLaren who shed light on his practice. This acknowledgment is in keeping with repeated warnings from Freire who was clear that we should not to seek to romanticise, fetishize or fossilise his ideas. Doing so would be to miss the message that it as the centre of his work, namely, that teacher practice should be viewed as *praxis* i.e. a constant re-examination of the ideas and reinvention of our thoughts and actions. In the spirit of critical pedagogy, we must dare to teach, but always in a critically reflexive way, as Freire (1996, p.23) explains:

> A correct way of thinking knows, for example, that the practice of critical teaching is not built as if thinking correctly were a mere given. However, it knows that without a correct way of thinking, there can be no critical practice. In other words, the practice of critical teaching, implicit in a correct way of thinking, involves a dynamic and dialectical movement between 'doing' and 'reflecting on doing.'.

The modest efforts which I have taken towards a more critical practice demonstrates how, even in the hands of the most standard practitioner, there can be found ways to reinvent a more liberatory form of pedagogy, through Freire. It is no longer enough for teachers to deliver curricula and syllabi to students in the hope of achieving social change. Rather, they must play their part by openly recognizing and challenging the role which these learning devices have in upholding the existing social order. In this way, they are called to '…take critical pedagogy to the streets of the real…[by] seeking questions, questions and more questions in which to make sense of the world of youth and of education' (Steinberg, as cited in Nikolakaki, 2012, p.232). Where this is not happening, then education is not taking place.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Data Analysis

This appendix outlines the process of data coding and analysis which was used to generate the research findings produced as part of this thesis.

Step 1: Handwritten questionnaires were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. See sample in figure 1.1 below:

Figure 1.1

Survey Number: 1

Gender: Female

1. **Why do you think people learn in general?**
   I think that people generally just have an interest in learning new things.
2. **Why do you think people learn in school?**
   It has to be done – school can effect your career path in the future.
3. **Which of the following statements best reflects your motivation to learn in school?**
   A combination of the above.
4. **What do you think the purpose of school in society *should be*?**
   A combination of the above.
5. **What do you think the purpose of school is in society, in general?**
   To get good grades, so that people can get good college courses/jobs.
6. **Based on your experience as a learner, which of the following statements best reflects what your school has tried to teach you over the past three years?**
   To get good grades in general.
7. **Based on your experience as a learner, which of the following statements best reflects what you have learned in school over the past three years?**
   A combination of the above.
8. **Please put a tick beside your three favourite subjects on the table provided below:**
   English/French/Music
9. **Thinking about your experience of secondary school over the past three years, which subjects have you enjoyed learning about the most?**
   Humanities
10. **Why did you enjoy learning about these subjects the most?**
    These subjects have a lot to offer – they cover many areas of interest.

Step 2: The responses from each individual questionnaire were imported into a single Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, in preparation for both coding and analysis. See sample in figure 1.2 below:

Figure 1.2

Step 3: All closed-text responses were imported into a single Excel spreadsheet. See summary sheet in figure 1.3 below:

Figure 1.3

Excel software was used to automatically calculate responses to multiple choice (closed) questions. See sample in figure 1.4 below.
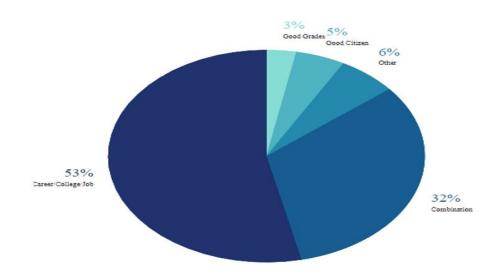
Figure 1.4

	A	B	C	D
1				
2	What do you think the purpose of schooling in society *should* be?			
3	**Row Labels**	▾ **Sum of Count**		
4	To provide students with employable skills for jobs which are economically in demand	1		
5	A combination of the above	19		
6	A combination of the above (well informed people + good citizens	1		
7	A combination of the above.	3		
8	How to be a well-informed person	1		
9	To create good citizens	8		
10	To create good citizens.	1		
11	To create well-informed people	10		
12	To create well-informed people.	1		
13	To get good grades, so that I can get a good college course/job	1		
14	To get good grades, so that people can get a good college courses/job	1		
15	To get good grades, so that people can get their preferred college courses/job	3		
16	To get good grades, so that people can get their preferred college courses/job, To provide students with employable skills for jobs with are economically in demand	1		
17	To provide students with employable skills for jobs which are economically in demand.	5		
18	To provide students with employable skills for jobs with are economically in demand	14		
19	**Grand Total**	**70**		
20				

Online software was used to create graphics which represented the data in chart form. See example in figure 1.5 below.

Figure 1.5

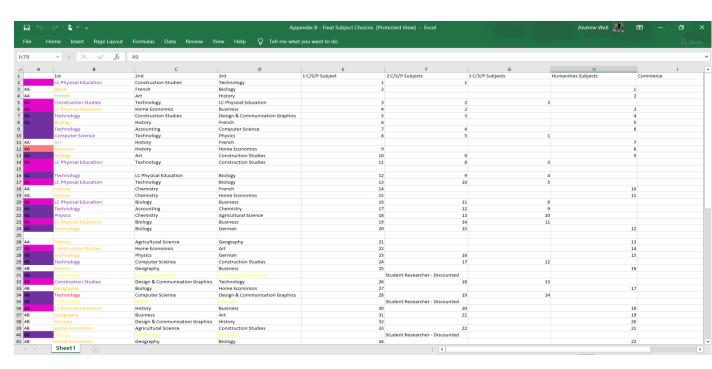Q. 3 Which of the following statements best reflects your motivation to learn in school? [Multiple Choice]

Step 4: Main themes and sub-themes were drawn from open text-based questions using a open/axial approach to coding analysis. See example in figure 1.6 below.

Figure 1.6

Q. 1 Why do you think people learn in general?

Main themes and sub-themes

Total Number: 70 Students

Boys: 44 [Exc. Student Researchers]

Girls: 26

Thematic Breakdown

Gender	Response	Main Theme	Sub-theme
S.1	I think that people generally just have an interest in learning new things.	Intrinsic	Human Nature
S.2	People want to learn new [work] skills.	Extrinsic	Work Skills
S.3	They need to do things right	Intrinsic	Self-Improvement
S.4	People learn to increase their skills on a certain job topic	Extrinsic	Career/Job
S.5	Because they are interested in it and they want to know more about it.	Intrinsic	Personal Interest

Separate spreadsheets were created to collate generative themes drawn from the (open) text-based questions. See example in figure 1.7 below.

Figure 1.7

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Q.1	Why	Do	People	Learn	In	General?	
Gender	Intrinsic 1	Intrinsic 2	Intrinsic 3	Intrinsic 4	Extrinsic 1	Extrinsic 2	Extrinsic 3
Survey	Human N	Personal I	Self Impro	Life Skills	Work Skills	Career/Jobs	College
S.1		Yes					
S.2					Yes		
S.3			Yes				
S.4						Yes	
S.5		Yes					
S.6		Yes					
S.7				Yes			
S.8			Yes				
S.9	Yes						
S.10	Yes						
S.11			Yes				
S.12						Yes	
S.13	Yes						
S.14			Yes				
S.15				Yes			
S.16			Yes			Yes	
S.17			Yes				
S.18				Yes			
S.19							Yes
S.20				Yes			
S.21	Yes						
S.22			Yes				
S.23			Yes				
S.24	Yes						
S.25			Yes				
S.26	Yes						

Online software was used to create graphics which represented the data in chart form. See example in figure 1.8 below.

Figure 1.8

Q.1 Why do people learn in general?

Appendix B:

This appendix provides a sample of the final subject choices which were made by student participants in the empirical research study. See sample in image 1.9 below.

Image 1.9

This appendix presents the original research timeline which had been set out for project completion, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Academic Year	2019
Month	**Activity**
September	**Week 1:** **- Study gatekeeper selected upon request.** **- Student researchers selected on voluntary basis.** **- Consent letters issued to parents/guardians of all participants.** **Week 3:** **- All consent letters completed and returned.** **- One week grace period enacted.**
October	**Week 1:** **- Student researchers complete induction.** **Week 3:** **- Student researchers complete study questionnaire.**
November	**Week 1:** **- Student researchers complete post-survey interviews.** **Week 3:** **- Student Researchers undertake minor research training in research methods and data collection** **- Student researchers complete first research exercise.**
December	**Week 1:** **- Student researchers complete second research exercise.** **Week 3:** **- Student researchers collect data for the empirical study.**
Academic Year	**2020**
January	**- Transcription of study questionnaires by the principal researcher.**
February	**- Collation and organization of data by the principal researcher.**
March 2020	**Week 1:** **- Student researchers undertake minor research training in data analysis.** **Week 3:**

	- Student researchers assist the principal researcher in the preliminary analysis of data.
April 2020	**<u>Week 1:</u>** **- Student researchers assist the main researcher in finalizing the data analysis.** **<u>Week 3:</u>** **- Data analysis is completed.**
May 2020	**- Student researchers provide feedback about their experience**

This appendix presents the questionnaire which was used to gather data from participants in the research study.

Research Study Questionnaire:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

All responses provided in this survey will be kept anonymous.

Please specify your gender: Female ☐   Male ☐   Other   ☐   [Please   State] _____

Please tick to confirm that you have completed the Junior Cycle: ☐

Please note that for the purpose of this questionnaire, school subjects will be divided into <u>four</u> categories:

1) Commerce

2) Humanities

3) STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths)

4) Practical subjects

A clear list of the subjects included in each category is provided below:

Commerce Subjects	Humanities Subjects	STEM Subjects	Practical Subjects
Accounting	Art	Biology	Metalwork
Business Studies	English	Chemistry	Technical Graphics
Economics	CSPE	Engineering	Woodwork
	Geography	Physics	
	History	Maths	
	Home Economics	Technology	
	Languages		
	Physical Education [P.E.]		
	Religious Studies		
	SPHE		

Please tick to confirm that you have read the above lists and understand the difference between the <u>four</u> different categories of subjects ☐

1. **Why do you think people learn *in general*? [e.g. learning new football skills; practising piano etc]**

I think that people learn in general because:

2. **Why do you think people learn *in school*? [e.g. doing homework; completing the Junior Cycle/ Leaving Certificate]**

I think that people learn in school because:

3. **Which of the following statements best reflects *your* motivation to learn in school? Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.**

- To become a well informed person ☐

- To become a good citizen ☐

- To get good grades in general ☐

- To get good grades, so that I can get a good college course/career/job ☐

- A combination of the above ☐

-   Other   ☐   [please   state]

_____

4. **What do you think the purpose of school in society *should be*? Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.**

-   To create well-informed people ☐

-   To create good citizens ☐

-   To get good grades in general ☐

-   To get good grades, so that people can get their preferred college courses/jobs ☐

-   To provide students with employable skills for jobs which are economically in demand ☐

-   A combination of the above ☐

-   Other   ☐   [please   state]

_____

5. **What do you think the purpose of school is in society, *in general*? Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.**

-   To create well-informed people ☐

-   To create good citizens ☐

-   To get good grades in general ☐

-   To get good grades, so that people can get good college courses/jobs ☐

-   To provide students with employable skills for jobs which are economically in demand ☐

-   A combination of the above ☐

-   Other   ☐   [please   state]

_____

6. **Based on your experience as a learner, which of the following statements best reflects what your school has *tried to teach you* over the past three years? Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.**

-   How to be a well-informed person ☐

- How to be a good citizen ☐

- To get good grades in general ☐

- To get good grades, so that I can get a good college course/job ☐

- To provide students with employable skills for jobs which are economically in demand ☐

- A combination of the above ☐

- Other   ☐   [please   state]

    _____

7. **Based on your experience as a learner, which of the following statements best reflects what you have learned in school over the *past three years*? Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.**

- How to be a well-informed person ☐

- How to be a good citizen ☐

- To get good grades in general ☐

- To get good grades, so that I can get a good college course/job ☐

- To provide students with employable skills for jobs which are economically in demand ☐

- A combination of the above ☐

- Other   ☐   [please   state]

    _____

8. Please put a tick beside your ***three*** favourite subjects on the table provided below:

<u>Commerce Subjects</u>	<u>Humanities Subjects</u>	<u>STEM Subjects</u>	<u>Practical Subjects</u>
Accounting	**Art**	**Biology**	**Metalwork**
Business Studies	**English**	**Chemistry**	**Technical Graphics**
Economics	**Geography**	**Engineering**	**Woodwork**
	History	**Physics**	
		Technology	
	Home Economics	**Maths**	
	French		
	German		
	Irish		
	Physical Education [P.E.]		

	Religious Studies
	Music

9. **Thinking about your experience of secondary school over the past three years, which subjects have you *enjoyed learning about* the most? Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.**

   - Commerce ☐

   - Humanities ☐

   - STEM ☐

   - Practical subjects ☐

   - A combination of the above ☐

10. **Why did you enjoy learning about these subjects the most?**

> **I enjoyed learning about these subjects the most because:**
>
>
>
>
>
>
>

11. **Thinking about your experience of secondary school over the past three years, which subjects do you think are *your strongest*? Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.**

   - Commerce ☐

   - Humanities ☐

   - STEM ☐

   - Practical subjects ☐

   - A combination of the above ☐

12. **Why do you think that these subjects are your strongest?**

> **I think that these subjects are my strongest because:**

13. Are your strongest subjects also the same as your favourite subjects?

- Always ☐

- Most of the time ☐

- Sometimes ☐

- Never ☐

14. Thinking of everything you do in life outside of school, which of the following statements best describes your motivation to learn, *in general*? [E.g. Improving your hobbies during free time outside of school]. Please tick *three* boxes [maximum] from the list provided below.

- Personal Interest [e.g. 'I find this fun and interesting'] ☐

- Personal role model [e.g. 'Someone I admire is good at this] ☐

- Pleasing my teacher(s) ☐

- Pleasing a family member(s) ☐

- Doing better than my friends/classmates ☐

- Earning *some* money [e.g. 'I could earn enough money doing this'] ☐

- Earning *a lot* of money [e.g. 'I could become rich doing this'] ☐

- Getting a career/job in which money *is* the main motivation [e.g. 'I would like to do this professionally but earning money is the main factor in my decision'] ☐

- Getting a career/job in which money *is not* the main motivation [e.g. 'I would like to do this professionally but earning money isn't really that important in my decision'] ☐

- Other   [Please   state]

  _____

15. Thinking of everything you do inside school, which of the following statements best describes your motivation to learn, *in school*? [E.g. Doing homework or

studying for exams, such as the Junior Cert]. Please tick _three boxes_ [maximum] from the list provided below.

- Personal Interest [e.g. 'I am really fascinated by this'] ☐

- Personal role model [e.g. 'Someone I admire is good at this] ☐

- Pleasing my teacher(s) ☐

- Pleasing a family member(s) ☐

- Doing better than my friends/classmates ☐

- The prospect of earning _some_ money [e.g. 'I could earn money if I became good at this'] ☐

- The prospect of earning _a lot_ of money [e.g. 'I could be rich if I became good at this'] ☐

- Getting a career/job in which money _is_ the main motivation [e.g. 'I would like to do this professionally but earning money is the main factor in my decision'] ☐

- Getting a career/job prospect in which money _is not_ the main motivation [e.g. 'I would like to do this professionally but earning money is not really that important in my decision'] ☐

- Other   [Please   state]
  _____

16. **Thinking about your experience of secondary school over the past three years, which subjects do _you_ think are the most important in school? Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.**

    - Commerce ☐

    - Humanities ☐

    - STEM ☐

    - Practical subjects ☐

    - A combination of the above ☐

    - They are all equally important ☐

    - I don't know ☐

17. **Thinking about your experience of secondary school over the past three years, which subjects would you say _teachers_ think are the most important in school? Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.**

    - Commerce ☐

    - Humanities ☐

- STEM ☐

- Practical subjects ☐

- They think that their own subjects are the most important ☐

- They think that all subjects are equally important ☐

- Their answer would depend on particular students/class groups ☐

- A combination of the above ☐

- I don't know ☐

18. **Thinking about your experience of learning over the past three years, which statement best reflects teachers'** *motivations* **for teaching in the classroom?**

- To help students to become well informed people ☐

- To students to become good citizens ☐

- To help students to get good grades in general ☐

- To help students to get good grades, so that they can get a good college course/career/job ☐

- A combination of the above ☐

- Other ☐ [please state]

   _____

19. **Over the past three years of learning, have you noticed any extra attention given to certain subjects in school, based on their importance in getting a** *professional* **job/career? [e.g. being told that some subjects are more likely than others to help you to get a secure job/career than others when you leave school].**

Yes ☐ No ☐

If you answered yes to question 19, please state which subjects:

- Commerce ☐

- Humanities ☐

- STEM ☐

- Practical subjects ☐

- A combination of the above ☐

20. Based on your experience over the past three years of learning, which subjects do you think are *the most* professionally employable? [i.e. they are most likely to help a person get a professional job/career in a skilled profession after school] Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.

- Commerce ☐

- Humanities ☐

- STEM ☐

- Practical subjects ☐

- A combination of the above ☐

- I don't know ☐

21. Which of the following routes do you plan to take next year:

- Option 1: Traditional Leaving Certificate [i.e. going into 5th year] ☐

- Option 2: Leaving Cert Applied [LCA] ☐

If you chose option 1, please continue to question 22.

If you chose option 2, please continue to question 24.

22. Over the past three years of learning, have you felt that pressure has been put on you *in school* to choose certain subjects for the Leaving Cert? Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.

Yes ☐ No ☐

If you answered yes to question 22, please state which subjects:

- Commerce ☐

- Humanities ☐

- STEM ☐

- Practical subjects ☐

- A combination of the above ☐

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23. Which of the following do you think will be the most important factors when choosing your subjects for the Leaving Cert? Please tick the <u>three</u> boxes [maximum] which you agree with the most.

- Choosing subjects based on the subject teacher(s) ☐

- Choosing the same subjects as my friends ☐

- Choosing subjects which my family have encouraged me to pick ☐

- Choosing subjects which I have enjoyed learning about the most ☐

- Choosing subjects which I think are my strongest ☐

- Choosing subjects which will be easiest to gain points in for the Leaving Cert ☐

- Choosing subjects which will lead to a career that I really want [because it pays a lot of money] ☐

- Choosing subjects which will lead to a career that I really want [but doesn't pay a lot of money] ☐

- Choosing subjects which are very employable ☐

- Choosing subjects which will lead to a career which will pay a lot of money ☐

- Choosing subjects which will help me gain entry to a nearby course/university ☐

- Other   [Please   state]

_____

24. Which of the following _subject options_ are you most likely to _choose_ for the Leaving Cert? [Subjects you will choose <u>aside</u> from English; Irish and Maths] Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below
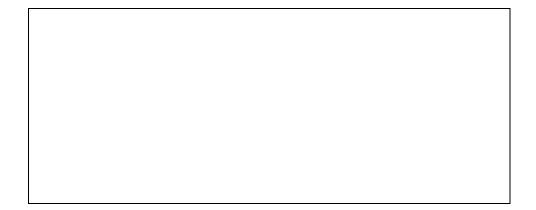
- Commerce ☐
- Humanities ☐

- STEM ☐
- Practical subjects ☐
- I hope to do LCA ☐
- A combination of the above ☐
- I don't know yet ☐

25. Why are you most likely to choose these subjects?

> **I am most likely to choose these subjects because:**

26. Which of the following subjects are you most likely to pursue *after* school? [E.g. For an Apprenticeship/ PLC Course/ University Course]. Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.

- Commerce ☐
- Humanities ☐
- STEM ☐
- Practical subjects ☐
- A combination of the above ☐
- I don't know yet ☐
- Not Applicable ☐

27. Which of the following fields are you most likely to pursue as a career/job? Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.

- Apprenticeship [Practical subjects] [E.g. Carpenter/Electrician] ☐
- Commerce [E.g. Accountant; Business/hotel management; Hospitality; Retail] ☐
- Humanities [E.g. Artist; Historian; Journalist; Librarian; Teacher etc] ☐

- STEM [E.g. Computer Scientist; Scientist; Software developer; Engineer etc] ☐

- A combination of the above ☐

- I don't know yet ☐

- Not Applicable ☐

If you chose 'I don't know yet' or 'Not applicable', please continue to question 28.

28. Why are you most likely to pursue this field as a career/job?

I am most likely to pursue this field as a career/job because:

29. Based on your own current understanding, a qualification in which subject is *most likely* to help a person to get a professional job/career after school? [E.g. a certificate/diploma/ college degree resulting in a skilled profession] Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.

- Commerce ☐

- Humanities ☐

- STEM ☐

- Practical Subjects ☐

- A combination of the above ☐

- I think that they are all equally likely to help people get a professional job/career ☐

- I don't know ☐

If you chose 'I don't know', please continue to question 31.

30. Why do you think a qualification in these subjects is most likely to help a person to get a *professional* job/career after school?

> **I think a qualification in these subjects is most likely to help a person to get a professional job/career after school because:**

31. **Have you attended any career days or received a careers' talk in school/on a school trip over the past *four* years?**

    Yes ☐   **No ☐**   **I can't remember ☐**

    If yes, please answer question 32. If you did not choose yes, then please continue to question 33.

32. **Which subjects did these events focus on? Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.**
    - Apprenticeship ☐
    - Commerce ☐
    - Humanities ☐
    - STEM ☐
    - Practical Subjects ☐
    - A combination of the above ☐
    - None of the above ☐
    - I can't remember ☐

33. **Which route do you think you will pursue after school?**

    - Apprenticeship   ☐
    - College Course   ☐
    - PLC Course   ☐
    - I am not sure yet   ☐
    - None of the above ☐

34. Are you likely to study higher level mathematics at for the Leaving Certificate? Please tick <u>one</u> box from the list provided below.

<div align="center">

Yes ☐   No ☐

</div>

If yes, please answer question 35. If no, please continue to question 37.

35. Is this decision influenced by the incentive of bonus points?

<div align="center">

Yes ☐   No ☐

</div>

36. Will your Junior Cycle results affect your subject choices for the Leaving Cert?

Yes ☐   No ☐

37. Do you plan to study at Dundalk Institute of Technology [DKIT]?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, please answer question 38 below. If no, please continue to question 39.

38.

I plan to study at Dundalk Institute of Technology [DKIT] because:

39. Given the choice, I would rather [Not applicable if you plan to choose LCA]:

- Choose subjects which I find the most interesting ☐
- Choose subjects which will enable me to pursue the job/college course I am most interested in ☐
- Choose subjects which I think are easy to gain points in for the Leaving Cert ☐
- Choose subjects which will enable me to pursue jobs which are economically in demand ☐

40. Are there any other opinions or views which you would like to share about your experience of learning over the past three years? If so, please write them in the space provided below. If not, then please continue to the end of the survey.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Appendix E:

This appendix presents complete transcripts of the post-questionnaire interviews that were carried out with the assistant researchers.

Interview with Assistant Researcher 1: 'Brian'

Me: I am here with 'Brian'. Brian thank you very much for taking the time after school and to reschedule and stay back to participate in this survey.

So, Brian I just want to get straight into things by beginning with question No. 2 on the original survey and there is your original survey if you want to follow along in your own handwriting. So, Brian question No. 2, I asked you "Why do you think people learn in school?". You said, "I think that people learn in school because it is required by law and people are too scared to speak up". So, my questions to you are as follows:

Do you think that learning in school should be required by law or that people should speak up?

Brian: Well I think it should still be somewhat required by law, but I don't think it should be as, like for example, specific subjects that you have to learn like in this school with maths, English and Irish. I don't think there should be specific subjects that everyone has to learn no matter what. I think there should be a bit of leeway with what people can and cannot learn and what that choose to learn or what they choose not to.

Me: Ok and do you think people should speak up against that or speak out?

Brian: I think they should, it is just that, there has been such a definitive way of life for so long people are just accepting well this is how it has been for so long we might as well just stay with it. We might as well just not try to change it.

Me: Ok. Question No. 3 on the survey asked you as follows "Which of the following statements best reflects your motivation to learn in school? Please tick one box from the list provided below." You ticked to have good grades so that I can get a good college course, or career or job. Why did you choose that option, why is that your main motivation?

Brian: Well I don't think there is any really other reason to do it, it is just like when I complete school I have to try and get a college degree or just wait to get a job to live my life and there is nothing really more I can do after that. There is not really more I can do other than that.

Me: Ok. Fair. What if I put it to you that you could learn because you enjoy learning or learn for the sake of learning?

Brian: Well I have never really enjoyed learning is the main reason, I never really liked learning things to, well it sort of depends on what I like, things I like to learn. For example, I am not great at history but some things in history I am intrigued by it so even though there are things that I like to learn, there is it is not the main reason why I do.

Me: Ok. Question No. 4 then on the new survey asks "Which of the following statements do you think best reflects other students' motivations to learn in school. Please tick one box from the list proved below." You ticked a combination of the above. So why did you choose this option for other student's motivation aside from yourself?

Brian: Well I think it is just that certain students have certain motivations, some do it for the same reason I do, some do it just because they have to, others do it because they are interested in what they are doing. I think it is just there is a variety of reasons why anyone else would do it.

Me: Ok so there is not one majority, there is a wide variety.

Brian: Yes.

Me: Question No. 5 on the original survey says as follows: "Thinking about your experience of learning over the past 3 years what do you think the main purpose of your school is? Please tick one box from the list provided below." You ticked "to prepare people for careers or jobs". So, my question is why do you think this?

Brian: Well, I think when you are teaching certain subjects looking back on it I think I may have picked a combination of the above cos some teachers teach you because they are interested in the subject but I think that a lot of the time, like sometimes they teach you things because they have to and sometimes they like for other reasons but I think the main reason that like, so you have options to get a job. I think that is the main reason why. I think if I was going to do it again, I may have picked a combination of the above but like I am kind of on the fence on like just preparing for careers or a combination of the above.

Me: Ok. And you just mentioned that you know that is the reason why teachers teach but again to be more specific, if I said what you think the purpose of school in society is or rather than teachers themselves in schools, would you say that the purpose of a school in society is to create well informed people, to create good citizens, the prepare people for careers/jobs or a combination of the above?

Brian: I think in society I think it is just to prepare people of their careers or jobs cos you know if you get a job, cos like with society in general if you get a job you can pay taxes, you can work, you can work, you can do things like that is how society is run. That is how it works so that is usually what schools are for is to allow you to become a member of society.

Me: Ok. Question No. 6 on the new survey asks "What do you think the purpose of school should be? Please tick one box from the list provided below" and again you picked a combination of the above. So, you have just mentioned in answer to question No. 5 that the purpose of school in society in your view is to prepare people for careers or jobs or that is more or less the purpose. So, for question No. 6 you have chosen that rather than just prepare people

of careers or jobs it should be a combination of the above. So, it should be more than just preparing people for careers and jobs?

Brian: Yeh. Cos I think that it is when you are, when you leave school you get a job, some people they sort of feel like you just go to a job, work, go home, go to sleep, wake up and go to the job and it is like just a continuous cycle and you never really, but if you are taught to do things more than that and taught to be a good citizen and taught not to just do everything as told, I think it would be just a better way to teach people about, like I think that's what teaching should be about. No to be just someone who goes, does their job and leave, just pretty much school again but without learning. Like just doing work just so you can live in society. I think there should be more reasons that to just be able to live in the world we have created.

Me: Ok. Moving on to question No. 11 on the original survey. So, question No. 11 asks, "Think of everything you do inside school, which of the following statements best describes your motivation to learn in school?" To which you wrote other and in your own words you wrote a combination of the last 2. The combination of the last 2 means that your motivation to learn in school is driven by getting a career or job in which money is the main motivation but also getting a career or job in which money is not the main motivation. So, could you possibly clarify it?

Brian: Right well what I was saying is that when I am trying to get a job I am trying to get a job that both I can get a good bit of money from it, like I can get a lot of money from it but also it is a job that I would like to do. Like if it is a job that I can get a good bit of money out and can live a good life, I can live a happy life and it is a job that is, I like to do cos I wouldn't like a job where I am just doing the same thing over and over and I am not really enjoying it but I get a lot of money for it and I also wouldn't like a job where I am doing what I like but I am not really getting a lot out of it.

Me: Ok. Thank you for clarifying. Question No. 14 on both surveys, so I will start with the original survey. "Over the past 3 years of learning have you noticed any extra attention given to certain subjects in school based on the importance of getting a job. Example being told that some subjects are more likely than others to help you to get a job when you leave school?" You chose STEM. Can I ask in what ways have you noticed extra attention being given to the STEM subjects?

Brian: Well, it is not really STEM subjects it is really just maths I think is given a lot of attention since you are given extra points for doing higher level since it is considered normally a difficult subject but also it gives you a lot of options when you leave school. Like if you have not only for subjects that involve maths but if you like, if you are given an application for a job like and someone saw that you did higher level maths you know that they are a fairly smart person and they can do considerably difficult subject at higher level. So, I think that is why it is given like a lot of, a lot more attention because it is considered difficult and it actually gives you a lot more options for jobs.

Me: Ok. So, based on what you have just said I would like to follow-up and ask you in what ways has higher level maths been given extra attention in your experience in school.

Brian: Well it is mainly just people, it is just the fact that it is given extra points. That means that people who make the exams and who decide what points certain subjects can get think that maths is so important and not only should it get the, that it should be like considered a really difficult subject it also gets bonus points for doing so, so considering I think it is the only subject that does that. Am I right? Yeh, since it is the only subject that has that, they consider that the most difficult subject and therefore people who do it, like so, more attention is given to people who can do higher level maths.

Me: Ok. And within school, have you noticed any extra attention being given to it from any members of staff, from your, from people in your year, from anyone at all or is that just how you view it based on the amount of points.

Brian: Well my 2nd and 3rd year maths teacher, am I allowed to say who they are?

Me: Well we do not need to specify names, but you can say your 2nd and 3rd year maths teacher.

Brian: Well my 2nd and 3rd year maths teacher, when we were originally, when we were in 2nd year we only had 5 maths classes and then in 3rd year we had 4 to make room for the option subjects and she said that it was, we had 6 classes seeing because of maths and its difficulty we require 6 subjects to do it instead of just 5 or 4. So I think that is extra attention given to it. Saying that we need more time to do it.

Me: Ok. Thank you for answering that question. Looking at question No. 14 on the new survey which I will put in front of you now just as a refresher. Actually, I will come back to that as it does not naturally flow but I will come back to that question. So, question No. 19 on the original survey asks, actually, yes question No. 19 linking to question No. 18. So, question No. 18 asks, "Which of the following subject options are you most like to choose for your senior cycle or for leaving cert. Please tick one box from the list provided below". You said a combination of the above. Question No. 19 asks, "Why you are most like to choose these subjects?". You said, "I am most likely to choose these subjects because I am good and interested in them and they fit well, they fit in well with the job I want." So, my question is, is the job you want the main motivation for your learning?

Brian: Well no as I state in that I am interested and I would like a job with them. So, it is like I am kind of interested in the subjects and I think that they could be useful for me getting the job that I would like, the job that I want.

Me: Ok. Going back to question 14 for a moment on the new survey it asks, "Are your strongest subjects also the same as you favourite subjects?" You ticked always. Could you please tell me a little more about your, why your strongest are also your favourites?

Brian: Well it is mainly just like I don't, like I am not very good with studying and I don't really like to do study but with the subjects that I enjoy while I am so naturally gifted at them I don't need to or I enjoy doing them so much that when I study I don't mind it. That is usually why I am better at the subjects I like.

Me: Ok. Moving on to the next question. You are asked "Thinking about your experience of secondary school over the past 3 years, which statement best describes teacher's motivation for teaching in the classroom?" So, you answered for question 19 a combination of the above. So, could you please explain to me why you answered that or why you think those are teacher's motivations?

Brian: Well I think each teacher may have their own individual like reason why you want to teach someone. Some may think that the student would be very gifted if they have this, some do it because its their job, others do it because it is a difficult subject and they really want to

make sure that the students do well in it. Like I think there is just a variety of reasons why certain teachers teach like why teachers teach, why they teach the way they do.

Me: Ok. Looking forward then to question No. 24 Brian on the original survey, or actually I will check it might be on the new survey. No, I miswrote that myself. So, I don't need to ask you question No. 24. Looking forward to question No. 29 on the new survey. Yes. So, question No. 29 asks "Based on your own current understanding, a qualification in which subjection is most likely to help a person to get a professional job or career after school. For example, a certificate, diploma, college degree resulting in a skilled profession. Please tick one box from the list provided below." You ticked STEM. Can you please tell me why you chose that option?

Brian: Because those subjects chemistry, physics, maths those are considered very professional subjects like some examples for those subjects would be like scientists or a physicist or those sort of things like you would consider very professional very like difficult jobs to get so hence why I think those are the like, it is why those jobs are considered profession subjects, or professional jobs or professional subjects.

Me: Ok. And is that a conclusion which you have reached by yourself or is that being informed by anyone or anything else.

Brian: I would like to say that I was the one that I figured that out for myself.

Me: Ok. So, there are no outside factors or forces telling you that?

Brian: No, I wouldn't think so no.

Me: Ok. Fine. Question No. 30 on the new survey asks related to question No. 29 "Why do you think a qualification in these subjects is most likely to help a person to get a professional job or career after school?" You said, "Since they are considered more professional jobs ie scientists, physicist." So, what do you think a scientist, or a physicist is considered a more professional job that lets say a teacher, a doctor or something else?

Brian: Well I think it is just like they are since like we are in the 21st century since we have been advancing a lot things, things like scientists have been allowing us to progress further and further in a world and it has allowed us to get things that are like we have been able to improve our lives a lot and it takes a lot of work and it is very hard to do so and it is very hard to like do the things that they do and it is hard to become. Like if you said that you were a scientist or that you are very famous or a very hardworking and smart scientist people would be impressed. But if you are saying that I am a decent teacher like it is not incredibly impressive compared to an incredibly smart scientist.

Me: Ok. Question No. 31 asks, "Will your Junior Cert results affect your subject choices for the leaving cert?" Did you answer yes or no?

Brian: I answered yes.

Me: Ok. So your results are out this week, in what ways will the results affect your decisions about choices for the leaving cert?

Brian: Well because we are late for subjects, I am almost certain that I want to pick technology, woodwork and physics. Those are like the 3 that I am almost certain that I would like to do but I still have one more do pretty much any one that I do really well in I will pick that one or I will pick anything related to that one. That's really the only reason.

Me: Ok. Finally, I just want to quickly glance my eye over both surveys and see if there are any further questions I would like to ask you based on what we have just discussed. Just one final question Brian where I note you didn't give an answer in the original survey which you are perfectly entitled to do and I am just curious if you left it blank intentionally or not. For question No. 16, oh I see actually there is a mistake there you chose no but I will just clarify that anyway but there appears to have been 2 answers given. "So over the past 3 years of learning have you felt that pressure has been put on you in school to chose certain subjects for senior cycle or Leaving Cert?. Please tick one box from the list provided below." You originally ticked commerce and I believe you may have removed that and then ticked no.

Brian: Yeh

Me: Or I am not sure whether you ticked no and then ticked commerce which is why I want to clarify with you. So, could I ask you if your answer is no or is your answer commerce?

Brian: No.

Me: No. You haven't experienced any pressure. Ok. That is absolutely no problem. Brian thank you so much for your time and for staying back after school today.

Brian: Great. That's fine.

Interview with Assistant Researcher 2: 'Tim'

Me: So, I am here with Tim. Tim thank you for taking the time after school to stay behind.

Tim: No bother.

Me: Tim you recently completed 2 questionnaires, one was the an original questionnaire for the purpose of the study and the second is one you have taken now which is based on revised questions which you and the other assistant researchers helped me to devise for future purposes so, we have updated that survey and you have just completed some questions on that. Is that correct?

Tim: Yes.

Me: Cool. So, Tim before we get into the questions just to repeat what I said to you earlier this isn't a test, this is not an interview, you are perfectly entitled to hold your own views and the questions which I am focusing on eh don't necessarily reflect my views or anyone else's so the reason I have chosen them isn't because I think they are right, their wrong, I may have just found something interesting about them, ok? So, Tim to start I am about to begin by asking you about question No. 2 on the original survey. Question No. 2 and there is by the way your own original survey if you want to follow it on in your own handwriting. Question No. 2 asks you, "Why do you think people learn in school" and Tim you answered, to that, your answer to that question was, "If you don't take part in school you will have no clue what you want to

do or be when you are older. We aren't born intelligent". So, my question to you is, do you believe that going to school makes us intelligent?

Tim: Well it will give us like a better idea when we get older and that because when we are younger we just think we will be able to do it straight away when we get older, we won't need school or anything but once we get into school we actually learn that we are not able to. Gate crashing.

Me: Ok. Thank you. Question No. 3 on the new survey asks you Tim, "Which of the following statements best reflects your motivation to learn in school? Please tick one box from the list provided below". The answer you gave Tim was "To get good grades so that I can get a good college course, career or job." Can you possibly tell me more about why you feel that way.

Tim: Yeh I do want to get good grades and that and I do either want to get into college or get a good job and that because my cousin got a great college degree in maths in the DCU and she is still there, she is doing great and everything and even my younger cousin is trying to do the same as well. So, I am trying to may be do something similar or just whatever I am best at.

Me: Ok. And would you say, given a choice would you say that you learn for a specific purpose or that you learn for the sake of learning or both?

Tim: Well, it also made me think that when I picked up technical graphics in here em I found how really good I was in that and just my dad once gave me a good idea in possibly going into designing maybe buildings or ships and that because he knew how much I loved ships and just may be I could get a college degree in technical graphics.

Me: Ok. So, it seems like you do have a specific purpose for learning in your own life.

Tim: Yeh.

Me: Ok. Question NO. 4 then asks you as follows: "Which of he following statements do you think best reflects other student's motivations to learn in school. Please tick one box from the list provided below." You ticked a combination of the above which is to say you think that other people in school learn so that they can become well informed people, to become good

citizens, to get good grades in general and to get good grades so that they can get a college course, career or job. So could you possibly tell me more about that? Why do you feel that way about other people's motivation for learning?

Tim: Because many of my old friends from primary when I meet up with them nowadays they just say many different things how they want to become well informed for when they want to into college and get a good degree or they just want to be good citizens like maybe starting up petitions for maybe homeless people or something like that and some others just want to get good grades in general eh to feel good about themselves.

Me: Ok. Question No. 6. "What do you think the purpose of school should be? Please tick one box from the list provided below." You said that you think the purpose of school should be to get good grades so that people can get a good college course or job or career. So, why do you think that should be the purpose of school?

Tim: Because em when you go into college that's definitely preparing you for a job and that or even a job that you might get abroad and that where you are travelling across the world. And em basically the teachers always say when it is coming up to the junior and leaving certs that you need to study, you need to study if you want to get good grades and get a good job or a good degree in college and that is basically how I think about it.

Me: Ok. No problem. Because you have mentioned that I just want to jump forward to question 19 for a moment. Question 19 asks as follows: "Think about your experience of secondary school over the past 3 years, which statement best reflects teacher's motivation for teaching in the classroom?". Can I ask which answer did you give? Actually, you wrote a combination of the above. So you have mentioned just now in your previous answer that coming up to exams teachers seem to focus on students performing well so that they can get a good career or job so, based on your answer do you think that teachers only behave that way approaching exams or is that there general purpose for teaching. Em so, my question is do they teach in general so that they can teach people to become better citizens and to get good grades in general and then they suddenly shift focus coming up to exams or the whole time is there view that they do their jobs so that people can get good grades, and careers and jobs?

Tim: I just think that they are just trying to help us get good careers in our lives, they are just trying, they are trying to do their job but they also want to try and help others just younger people and that and they just want to help us get good jobs and that and just make us well informed. Like no one wants to grow up not knowing stuff because they (crashing in background) practically when they were our age they had teachers that were very strict and just I rather have sympathy for them and really understand they are trying their best just to help us.

Me: Ok. No. 14 then Tim asks you as follows: "Are your strongest subjects also the same as your favourite subjects?". You chose always.

Tim: Yeh because my strongest subjects, arts or graphics and biology when I thought I wasn't good at science I was very good in the biology department and PE as well. Because em they are my favourite as well and basically PE and biology I am going to see if I can keep on as 2 study subjects for the leaving cert because I do athletics like Daniel here and em biology and PE could both teach me more about stamina and your speed and that and more about what the human body can take and as I said about my dad explaining how much I love ships and that with technical graphics that can help me design ships.

Me: Ok. *Shuffling of paper.* So next question Damien, apologies you just mentioned Damien's name. Next question Tim. Question No. 8 "Based on your experience as a learner which of the following statements best reflects what you have learned in school over the past 3 years. Please tick one box from the list provided below." You chose a combination of the above so, could you please tell me a little more about that?

Tim: *(Talking in background).* Yes em they have helped me reflect on back on what I use to be like in primary and that cos when I left I thought I was well more informed that when I started 8 years before then but then I realised how much more I had to learn about being well informed for the future to be a good citizen and how much your grades can really help you and how much college can help you too and just it also made me question my cousin who is in the DCU just about what's it like and just does she enjoy it and that and she says it is really good and she enjoys it being with her friends and that and that it is really helping her feel good about possibly becoming a maths teacher and possibly a primary, secondary or even in a college herself.

Me: Ok. No problem. Moving on to question No. *(bell ringing)*, just for a moment I will just double check that against my own records, eh question No. 18. So Tim question No. 18 asks you "Which of the following subject options are you most likely to choose for senior cycle. Please tick one box from the list provided below". You ticked "humanity subjects". Why the focus on humanities?

Tim: Well with humanities mainly has the most subjects of all that I do like or either know that could give me a good chance in the future. Em I forget to mainly tick a combination of the above since like maths would be in STEM and eh in the other would be like business studies and that's eh, and that can be a real good subject em but mainly it is because my favourites are in there, my strongest ones are in there and basically I am getting on great in all the subjects that I have that are listed in humanities.

Me: Even though, well yes tech graphics is humanities eh but also biology which is a science subject.

Tim: Ah yeah.

Me: But ok no problem. Em so moving on Tim to question No. 20. So, question 20 asks, "Based on your experience over the past 3 years of learning which subjects do you think are the most professionally employable?" Which is to say they are the most likely to help a person get a professional job or career in a skilled profession after school. You chose a combination of the above. So could you tell me why a combination of the above subjects would help a person to get a professional job rather than just focusing on one specific area?

Tim: Because mainly all those subjects would help a person to definitely get a good job like as a teacher if they have their favourite subject and they would like to teach it to others and eh if someone wanted to definitely become a doctor biology would become a great thing for that or the way with me and athletics PE and biology would be good as well. Business Studies is a very good subject as well to learn. If it would be really good and beneficial for others I would know really as I didn't pick it but I say it is really helping some of my other friends who have picked it in the past.

Me: Ok and it seems that your view is that it is best to be well rounded when it comes to learning so to have a combination of a number of different subjects rather than just getting too focused or pigeonholed in one. You think it might be best to have a little sample of each or know a little bit about each.

Tim: Yeah.

Me: Ok. No. 24, just one moment while I flick through the survey. *Papers shuffling*. Ok, so Tim question no. 24 asks as follows: "Why do you think these subjects are most likely to help a person to get a job after school?" So, in other words why do you think a combination of the above subjects is most likely to help a person get a job after school. You said "The majority of people would most likely want to be teachers or probably doctors or nurses example biology", so why do you think this? Why do you think most people would likely want to be doctors or nurses or teachers?

Tim: Eh because many people em some of my friends would like to help others and that like the way I would actually not mind becoming a doctor if I don't ever go into the fire business or possibly going after a tech graphics job em because my grandfather told me stories a lot of how he was an ambulance driver and how much he actually had to help the doctors a lot eh in a lot of serious accidents and that that and some of the stories were really shocking of the rescues he had to make and how many lives he actually saved himself.

Me: Ok. Thank you for sharing. Question No. 27 "Which work do you think you will pursue after the leaving cert?" You ticked 3 options. You said apprenticeship, college course and also I am not sure yet. Could you please explain to me why you picked those boxes?

Tim: Well I am not sure because *(bell ringing)* I haven't really decided fully yet on any of them but I have been thinking about apprenticeship if I were to still go into medical or em a firemanship eh like apprenticeship would like mean I would need to possibly become an apprentice electrician like my dad did to get into the fire business or a college course would be good as I kept explaining about my cousin and that but em basically just I remember my dad telling me that he was an electrician because it helped him become a fireman and he did a lot of repairs around peoples houses and that and he got a fair bit of pay out of it.

Me: Ok. Em and is money a motivation for you in that way?

Tim: Well a bit because I would like to pay and keep my house that I have right now just because I wouldn't like to move or anything or just to at least support my house and that.

Me: Ok. The follow-up question is in relation to question no. 27 "When do you think you will make a decision about your career path after the leaving cert?

Tim: That is mainly what I am thinking about during TY eh letting TY show me more about maybe what to accept or something. Like the school summits are mainly helping like with college courses and that because I found a lot of good colleges around Ireland there about 2 weeks ago that were pretty good.

Me: Ok. Em final question relating to question NO. 27, what factors will inform your decision and so what type of information that you might come across during TY is going to help you make up your mind about em about making a decision about your future career?

Tim: Em like technology that could help me a bit with circuits and that if I were ever to take on the apprenticeship of an electrician, it could help me figure out all the wiring in say lights or maybe even if I took on being a mechanic as an apprentice as well that could help me em with cars and that how it affects them.

Me: Ok. So, just a few more questions *(someone comes into the room)*. So, moving on then to question No. 29 which is on the new survey so, "Based on your own current understanding which subjects, a qualification in which subjects do you think is most likely to help a person to get a professional job or career after school?" So for example a certificate, diploma, college degree resulting in a skilled profession. Please tick one box from the listing provided below. You choose "I think they are all equally likely to help people get a professional job or career". Why did you choose that?

Tim: Well the teacher thing again if anybody wants to go for a teacher it is pretty simple enough with all the subjects you could choose and em basically em yeh the design as I mentioned that would be good as well. The doctor business. The fire business as well like biology would still also help you with em the firemanship because you would definitely still

know how to perform CPR or anything because some fireman can actually be medical firemen which have to help the person regain air or something after they have been trapped in a burning building possibly.

Me: Ok. Just a few more questions to go. Question No. 30 Tim asks "Why do you think" actually I will leave question 30 because you have more or less just explained and elaborated. So, question No. 31 then asks, "Will your junior cycle results affect your subject choices for the leaving cert?"

Tim: Well I though of it and I think yes because em you are not going into the leaving cert completely clueless you have a better understanding and that from your junior cert because your experience from your junior cert is practically preparing you for the big leaving cert you will have in 3 years after it. So, you won't be lost or anything in your leaving cert, you will be well more prepared than when you first came in in first year.

Me: Ok. And Tim before I let you go I just want to have a quick look through the original questionnaire and make sure that there are no questions, other questions that I would like to ask you about. So I am just going to double check that super quick. So. *(Shuffling of paper).* Ok, one final question and I think that is it for today. So, question No. 11 on the original questionnaire asks "Thinking of everything you do inside school which of the following statements best describes your motivation to learn in school?" The option which you choose is "Pleasing my family members". So, could you please tell me why you feel that pleasing your family members is the biggest, is a bigger motivation for you in school than any other factor?

Tim: Well, my family do always tell me that they are always pleased and proud of me and that but I would just like to maybe surprise them with some good outstanding results possibly because I would, as long as I know they are pleased I am pleased and that. But just I use to think when I was younger I just wanted, I wanted to make them so pleased one day like when I use to just do sports and that because I didn't know what secondary would be like. I thought I would make them extremely proud but em when I came into secondary and I learned more about year grades and that I wanted to do some day maybe think if I could possibly get all A's in possibly all of them and that would be great and everything. But I know they are pleased now but just possibly I could get eh straight A's possibly in time for the leaving cert.

Me: Ok. Tim thank you very much for your time today and thank you for staying behind after school to participate.

Tim: No problem.

Interview with Assistant Researcher 3: 'Richard'

Me: Ok I am here with Richard. Richard thank you for taking time after school today. Em Richard I am going to begin by asking you questions from the old survey and just to clarify for the purpose of the tape there are 2 separate surveys, there is the original survey and then we met as a group together to revise the survey and to make some changes. As a result you have answered some questions on the new updated survey and I will be asking you some questions around that new updated survey also. Ok. Em so Richard you have a copy of your original survey in front of you.

Richard: I do yes.

Me: As do I and I am just going to begin by asking you about question 1 on the old survey or the original survey. So, question 1 asks you "Why do you think people learn in general?" and you said "It could help them later in life i.e. language, how economy works etc". Why did you say this?

Richard: I said this because em for instance personally I would love to visit Japan so I would love to you know get up some sort hold on language and also if you were to know how the economy works you would know ok I shouldn't really invest in the Euro now for example or the pound now after maybe after Brexit as that isn't a wise decision.

Me: Ok.

Richard: Or maybe a wise decision.

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Me: Ok. Moving on to question no 2 then in front of you asks you "Why do you think people learn in school?" You said "I think that people learn in school because to get people into a routine of leaving their house early to get them into the routine of work away from work". Could you elaborate or tell me more on what you mean by that?

Richard: Em so most jobs em like the song are from 9 to 5. I believe school is to get them into a routine of you leave your house early, you arrive back relatively mid to late in the day and if I were to be sprung into this out of nowhere just say if if school were to be from maybe 12 to 4 or 5 I wouldn't exactly be use to waking up early then and I my sleep pattern for example would not be the greatest and I wouldn't get well rested so I believe that having sorry I believe that having people get up early gets them use to just typical jobs.

Me: Do you think that is a good thing, or a bad thing or ….?

Richard: Personally I don't think it is too bad because on one hand most jobs are 9 to 5 anyway or in and around that time period but then you have nightshifts which are a completely different ball game so I wouldn't say it would prepare you for nightshifts but then again they are not too common.

Me: Ok. Moving on question No. 3 on the new survey which you just completed a short while ago. So, question 3 asks "Which of the following statements best reflects your motivation to learn in school, please tick one box from the list provided below. "You said "To become a well-informed person." Why did you choose this?

Richard: I chose this because I believe that having a great source of knowledge would make you more of an interesting character per se. For example, I wouldn't exactly be too interested in a person who knows nothing about nothing, I would rather know talk to someone who knows something about some things.

Me: Ok. And if I were to ask you, in your opinion if I asked the same question to other people in your year group, which answer do you think they would give?

Richard: Em I believe they would pick em to get good grades so that they can get a stable job.

Me: Ok. Why do you think that?

Richard: I think this because em most subjects there is a wide variety of subjects and sorry there is a wide variety of subjects and em I just need some time to think.

Me: Take your time.

Richard: There is a wide variety of subjects so that *(banging in the background)* so everyone could have some sort of choice in the matter of what they would like to do when they grow older.

Me: Ok. And you think that schooling provides people with that choice?

Richard: I do believe so.

Me: Ok. Question No. 4 "What" on the new survey "What do you think the purpose of school is in general? Please tick one box from the list provided below." You ticked "To get good grades so that people can get good college courses or jobs." Why did you choose that?

Richard: I chose this so em, sorry, em.

Me: Feel free to have a look.

Richard: I chose this because well I mean if we didn't have school in general then we wouldn't exactly have eh as many intelligent people going to jobs for example like you wouldn't exactly hire some random Jo Smo off the streets to become an electrical engineer.

Me: Ok. So, you think that this is, actually linking that into the next question, which is question 5 on the survey, em which asks you "What do you think the purpose of school should be?" You chose "A combination of the above", which indicates that you don't think that schooling should solely be about getting good courses or jobs?

Richard: Yes.

Me: Can you tell me more?

Richard: Well em I will answer them in each part.

Me: Sure.

Richard: As referenced earlier, to create well informed people as I said I would rather be talking to a semi-intelligent person than a not so intelligent person. Ah to create good citizens, to have people well-mannered because I wouldn't exactly like to be talking to many rude people so that's why. Eh to get good grades I think it is good to em give people a goal and sort of determination for what they want to do cos if you if they just lay back then they are not going to achieve much in my opinion. And to get good grades for em careers I think that speaks for itself.

Me: Ok. Eh, what do you think defines an intelligent person, what makes a person intelligent?

Richard: Em.

Me: In school.

Richard: In school?

Me: Yeh.

Richard: I would say is this like in a criteria for their grades or?

Me: You tell me. What criteria would you set down in your own mind for an intelligent person in school?

Richard: I would say intelligent people would be, how would it be, how would I word this? (Footsteps in the background). I would say, oooh, if I was to grade them I would say an intelligent person would be average maybe D's to B's that's on average what I assume an intelligent person would be in the school cos there are some other people who, I hate how this sounds but I kind of get they are not really the brightest, em their grades reflect on that matter

and some people who I have talked to who are, who sound and who I speak are very knowledgeable and their grades also reflect this.

Me: Ok. So, in your view or in your experience there is some link, correlation between grades and some type of intelligence?

Richard: Yes.

Me: Ok. And eh is it possible for a person to do poorly in school, to achieve or to have bad grades and to fail school but to also be intelligent?

Richard: It is entirely possible like em for example someone could be I don't know have some way with words but just not have a good way of putting them pen to paper I think.

Me: So is that how intelligence should be assessed, your ability to put pen to paper?

Richard: Not put pen to paper but just maybe like are you a problem solver, are you quick to find new solutions?

Me: And what if a person is a problem solver and they are quick to find new solutions but they are not good at tests?

Richard: Then I think maybe em, whew, sorry can you just repeat the question please?

Me: So, what if a person is a good problem solver and they are a good thinker but eh unfortunately for that person they are not good at testing or at putting pen to paper?

Richard: It could be a whole thing of maybe they are not good at expressing themselves and they could just think in their mind but not in a way of saying it out loud for example.

Me: Ok. And in your view how would you approach solving such a problem, is that just poor luck for that person or should something be done about that to accommodate such people in school?

Richard: I do believe something should be done to accommodate it but I'm em not sure the way or how it could be done.

Me: Ok. Moving on to question No. 9 on the new survey. Em. Asks "Thinking about your experience of secondary school over the past 3 years which subjects have you enjoyed learning about the most? Please tick one from the box provided below. "You chose "Humanities" and specifically you have listed your favourite subjects as being "Art, English and Technology". And so just to clarify could you please tell me more about why you have enjoyed those subjects?

Richard: I really enjoyed those subjects because emm I enjoy them because I love seeing things coming together. I like expressing myself and for example in technology seeing like starting from pieces of scrap metal and wires and turning it into a car for example and in arts having this big kind of rock of clay and turning it into a sea dragon for example.

Me: Yeh so not quite creating something from nothing but creating eh a being or an abject or an artefact from raw materials.

Richard: Yes.

Me: Yeh, bringing something to life. Ok. Em so linking that into question No. 13 then eh you said, the question asked you "Are your strongest subjects also the same as your favourite subjects?" You said "Most of the time". So, are there some subjects that you perform really well at but they just don't happen to be your favourite subjects?

Richard. Em yes. Em subject technical graphics it is by far my best subject I do but at the same time I don't really have the strongest interest in it. I really like it but it is just that I am not really interested *(footsteps in the background)* in a career path that has to do with technical graphics and I am also quite good at science but I am not really interested in that department either.

Me: I would like to revisit that eh later with you because I believe, and do correct me if I am wrong, I believe in the original survey you mention that you would likely end up pursuing a

STEM career so a career in science, technology, engineering or maths rather than a career in humanities. Have I remembered correctly?

Richard: You have. I mainly refer to engineering and technology. Those are the two main things. Sciences and maths aren't really. Maths does have a play in with engineering but there are other ways around it like computer engineering for example.

Me: Lets unpack that or discuss that for a moment.

Richard: Sure.

Me: So, if I am understanding correctly, em you're the subject which you have enjoyed most are largely humanities.

Richard: Yes.

Me: But you see yourself as ending up in a STEM career. Could you explain how that works out for you in your mind?

Richard: Em I say this because the one thing I am most interested in is computers and that would like in to engineering and technology would it not?

Me: Yes, it would.

Richard: Yeh and I find them really easy to work with and that is most likely the career path I would choose and in my opinion I believe it is more difficult to find a career path in humanities.

Me: What makes you say that?

Richard: I say that cos this might just be a case of me not being as knowledgeable but from my knowledge there aren't really many jobs out there that eh other than teachers of course, that would entice like geography. Like you could maybe become a meteorologist for example but em qualifications for that I am not quite sure of.

Me: Ok. Sure. And where do you, where has this impression come from for you that humanities isn't as employable such as other subjects such as STEM or commerce?

Richard: I feel it is mainly from day to day life, like I don't see any of my parents or family members got anything to do with those humanity subjects so that is just my personal view of it well really just view in general I guess.

Me: Ok. No problem. Eh so moving on to question No. 14 on the old survey, the old survey, the original survey. Papers shuffling. This question, actually I just want to clarify because I believe I asked you did I repeat it here on the new survey? Em I have. Em so I am just going to focus on the old survey for a moment. So question 14 on the old survey asks you "Over the past 3 years of learning have you noticed any extra attention given to certain subjects in school based on their importance in getting a job e.g. being old that some subjects are more likely that others to help you get a job when you leave school?" You ticked "Yes" to that.

Richard. I did yes.

Me: And you then eh the question further asked you "If you answered yes to question eh 14 please state which subjects and you ticked "STEM".

Richard: Yes.

Me: So, my question to you is in what ways have you noticed extra attention being given to those subjects?

Richard: Em out of the whole STEM thing it is mainly maths I have seen a bias towards. Mainly because eh for *(shouting in the background)* most maths classes em this could just be my own personal experience but em any time I have moved on to a new subject I have found it more difficult, I have asked the teacher sir or madam, "What situation would I need this in" and they have just been saying you will need it, it is really important but I have never actually got a direct answer but so I have just been told over and over again that it is important but I never quite new the reason.

Me: Ok. Moving on questions No. 19 and 20 on the, let me see, the new survey, I just want to clarify, actually question No. 20 on the new survey asks "Based on your experience over the past 3 years of learning which subjects do you think are the most professionally employable i.e. they are most likely to help a person get a professional job career in a skilled profession after school." You ticked "A combination of the above." Meaning that eh if I understand correctly that you feel it is more or less equally likely that a combination commence, humanities, STEM eh gives a person an equal chance of gaining professional employment in a skilled profession or job. Why do you think that?

Richard: I think that because, well if anyone, most people I hope anyway are determined, like they have determination and if someone is willing to do something, like get a certain job I am sure that they want that job and they will do anything for that job.

Me: Ok.

Richard: So, I think it just comes down to pure determination.

Me: Ok. No problem. Question No. 21 on the original survey. Paper shuffling and voices in the background. Asks as follows "Which of the following feels, let me see I just want to make sure if we have covered that, yes we have covered that already em just be discussing the earlier questions. So, moving on then to question NO. 29 on the new survey, papers shuffling, says "Based on your own current understanding a qualification in which subject is most likely to help a person to get a profession job or career after school?" You said "I think that they are all equally like to help a person to get a profession *(Door banging)* or career". So could you please tell me more about that?

Richard: Em. This also kind of links in with what I have been saying earlier. Determination. If someone is willing to do something they will do it. Or so I think.

Me: So, it is to do with sheer want and effort and desire?

Richard: Yes. It may takes years and years *(bell ringing in the background)* but eventually I think it will be like, for example my own personal experience, my father he is em, he has wanting to be a chef for years, for I would say 14 years and he has had restaurant after

restaurants, stuffs happened out of his control but now he is actually proper gotten a restaurant working for him and it is going quite well for him. So.

Me: Ok. Question No. 30 on the new, actually question No. 27, I will just double check for a moment myself on the original survey. I will come back to that at the end because it links into something else. So em we have just had your answer to question 30 as well. You have just elaborated on that verbally what you had written down so I don't need to ask you about that directly. Eh because you have more or less (interruption by a female) verbally just repeated what you wrote down. Em so question No., yes ok, question No. 27 on the original survey asks "Which route do you think you will pursue after the leaving cert? Em you said "I am not sure yet". So my questions to you are, when do you think you will make a decision and what factors will inform you making this decision?

Richard: I think since the survey I have had to think about it and em I would probably hemmm, I would probably, Oh I didn't actually, I thought it was which of the subjects? Sorry eh.

Me: Question 27.

Richard: Question 27 yes sorry.

Me: Take your time.

Richard: Yeh I am still in the I am not sure yet.

Me: Fine. So direct questions then, when do you think you will make a decision and if you aren't sure when you will make a decision, what factors will help you make a decision?

Richard: Em. I think the factors that will help make a decision is knowing more about what kind of career paths that would help me. Like for example the computers I need to now like would an apprenticeship help me or a direct college course? Like would I learn better from a college course or hands on experience?

Me: Ok. And when do you think you will know that? Is that something that you hope to discover during transition year or?

Richard: Sorry do you want to?

Me: No. Go ahead.

Richard: I hope to learn this through my work experience since I have a job sets in computer repairs and it is something my uncle, it's a business my uncle use to be a part of and through that I hope to hopefully get an idea of what I will need.

Me: Ok. So, question No. 36 on the new survey.

Richard: Yes.

Me: "Will your junior cycle results affect your subject choices for your leaving cert? So you have received your results last Friday.

Richard: *Clears throat*

Me: So will they eh affect your subject choices for your leaving cert?

Richard: Em.

Me: You originally ticked no but now that you have received them has anything changed?

Richard: Nothing has changed em because I have kind of had, throughout the summer I have been thinking like I know how well I did in each, I know what I am capable of and I know what I would like to try so through that no they have not encouraged me or discouraged me from taking part in any particular subjects.

Me: Ok.

Richard: For example if I may emm technical graphics it's my strongest subject but I don't think I am going to pick it for leaving.

Me: Ok so in that sense you are not, even though you could achieve high points with that subject perhaps more easily but are not going to choose that because it does not interest you as much.

Richard: Yes.

Me: As other subjects. Ok. And Richard that is the end of the questions which I have listed for you that I would like to ask you but I am very quickly just going to look over the original survey (Papers shuffling) em just as a protocol to make sure that there is nothing that you have mentioned just now which I could bring back to a different question. Ok so tying everything which you have just told me together I would like to just ask you 2 more related questions.

Richard: Sure.

Me: Which are questions no. 10 and 11 on the original survey. (papers shuffling). Which ask "Thinking of everything you do in life outside of school which of the following statements best describes your motivation to learn in general". You chose "Personal interest" and then similarly for (Bell chiming) question NO. 11 "Thinking of everything you do inside school which of the following statements best describes your motivation to learn in school" at which again you chose "Personal interest".

Richard: Yes.

Me: So, it would see based on the questions you have just answered already that this more or less aligns and corresponds with what you have already told me. You seem to be driven by personal interest in learning rather than any other types of factors. So if I could ask you eh one or two questions. First question, same questions, would you say that your answer personal interest in learning, would you say that that is similar for most people your age or different.

Richard: Em. I am not quite sure, it kind of depends on the person but if we are doing a general census of the whole thing?

Me: Well, if I could be more particular. People in your year group.

Richard: People in my year group. I would say, I would say emmm. *Pauses*. I would say maybe getting a career or job em from like from the department of which they are learning from.

Me: And why do you think that they would be different, or why do you think that they would have that answer em why would they be more career or job driven?

Richard: Eh this might be a bias but from like what I have heard from my friends its mainly what I have heard from them, oh I am doing this subject so that I can get some sort of job in that department.

Me: Ok. And is the job linked to anything else that would motivate them?

Richard: Emm.

Me: Do you think that they are motivated by jobs or the benefits of having a job, just to be clear?

Richard: To be honest I am not quite sure but if I were to guess I would say the benefits of having got a job because it could be a whole thing of oh I want this job because it does x, y and z or I could just do this because I like it and it does x, y and z.

Me: Ok. Final question Richard is as follows and it is not written down just based on whatever I asked you. You don't seem, or at least you have not indicated in the survey so far that you are particularly driven by a particular job or earning money. Eh, you are just interested in pursuing something which interests you.

Richard: Yes.

Me: Could you tell me why you are not interested or focused on a job, career or money?

Richard: Em well mainly I just, if I am honest, I don't really care for money that much it mainly experience that drives me. I love learning new things and just applying that to real life. Just em makes me enjoy it more.

Me: Richard thank you so much for your time today.

Richard: No problem.

Me: I really appreciate you staying behind after school.

Interview with Assistant Researcher 4: 'David'

Me: Ok so David thank you for staying behind after school today and for agreeing to be interviewed. Just so you know the questions I am going to be asking you are based on the survey which you completed about 2 weeks ago or less than 2 weeks ago.

David: Right.

Me: You have had the chance to look back over that just now and you have also completed questions on a revised questionnaire which you and other students researchers have advised me on.

David: Right

Me: So, you have completed the new questions that were added to the survey. Em. The only other piece of information I would like to provide you with before proceeding is to let you know that the answers or the questions which I am interviewing you on as previously stated are not necessarily correct right/wrong.

David: Right.

Me: They are your opinion and the fact that I have selected them for eh for discussion doesn't necessarily mean that they reflect my opinions or something I do agree with or disagree with eh whatsoever. In most cases I found them interesting. Em and that most of the questions I ask you will be the same as those which I asked other people or eh the other students that agreed

to be interviewed. Lastly, I would also say that when I interview you now em and ask you these questions I am going to avoid giving you any ques or responses as best I can. So I am.

David: Yeh.

Me: I am going to try to avoid giving you any body language singles. I am also going to avoid saying good, bad or keeping going or that's interesting. In other words when you finish giving me an answer I will do my best not to give you any suggestion because I wouldn't want to bias your view.

David: Right. Yeh.

Me: Or otherwise influence you. Ok. So lets get into it then. So, David the first question I would like to ask you about and you can feel free to look at your own em original survey there. Em I have just highlighted one or two things. So, looking at question 2.

David: Right.

Me: Em you, in response to the question "Why do you think people learn in school, examples doing homework, completing the junior cycle or the leaving cert?". You said "I think that people learn in school because it is viewed as a proper way of learning. I disagree with elements of the modern day school system but I don't view it as a waste of time. If I do well in an exam it proved I worked hard on it. I may not have enjoyed it but I should get use to it." So, based on your answer to that question David I would like to ask you two questions. The first question is "Which elements of the modern day school system do you disagree with?

David: Right. Em. I am not really sure. Some classes like sometime you are better at actually, its mainly the teachers mainly depending on how they teach I would disagree with. Like sometimes watching something might be better than just writing stuff down or some teachers don't ask enough questions. Some teachers aren't active with their students, they will just given you mindless stuff you are not going to be paying attention to. Like, I remember, I am not going to say what class or anything but I remember learning a lot throughout one year in one subject and then the next year I changed subject, changed teacher for that subject and I

didn't learn anything that year because all we were doing was reading from the book really and taking notes from the book, so, I would totally disagree with that.

Me: Ok. Fine. The second part of that question which I want to ask you about is that again to remind you and you can see in front of you, you said "If I do well in an exam it proved I worked hard on it. I may not have enjoyed it but I should get use to it". So my question to you is why should you get use to it?

David: Well you see like the way I view it is, like I was saying on getting good grades, I don't necessarily, like I don't like history at all but see I had better study cos I will have to study for other things I am not going to enjoy in life so I might as well get use to that form of learning. So, I know I will be things for my job I won't enjoy or memorising things for anything else in life so just get use to being bored at some points so.

Me: Is that primarily how you view learning? Memorising?

David: Not necessarily. It really depends. Like I will study like by just memorising things but like for example some subjects I have done my junior cert exam and some I would say I have done quite well in but if you hand it to me now I wouldn't remember a thing because I have just erased it over the summer because it was like I don't need that. But (very loud overhead intercom system) I remember. No but for example I try to remember stuff in maths because I know I will have to pick up back on that but geography I didn't really see a point like I will remember what I think I need to remember and believe the same thing will happen for when I leave school, for later I might not remember some stuff I learnt in say if I pick biology that I think I need.

Me: Ok. Fine. Moving on to question 4 which asks "What do you think the purpose of schooling in society should be? Please tick one box from the list provided below." The box which you picked was "To prepare people for careers or jobs." So my question to you is why do you think this?

David: Well see I believe that's how schooling is for me. I view it kind of differently for some people like I like to view myself as quite an active enough student so I will try and learn and get good grades but in every school you are going to find you know people who will mess

or are part of a bad bunch so, I would view some a lot of teachers wouldn't even try to teach them necessarily just try and keep them from stopping others from being taught so, it really depends. They might try and create good citizens out of them because they cannot focus on two things at the same time. So, it really depends on the student in my opinion. But I feel like I have been taught on how to get a career or a job.

Me: Ok.

David: In most subjects.

Me: Ok. Fine. Linked to that question going back and revisiting question 3 from the new questionnaire.

David: Yeh.

Me: A new question which you and other students advised I put in or reworded was as follows: "Which of the following statements best reflects your motivation to learn in school? Please tick one box from the list provided below." David you opted to avail of the blank space where you could input your own comment and you said "To prove I can".

David: Yeh. Like that falls into the em like to prove that I can do well if I put my mind to it. So, I may not have enjoyed it but I know I can do it I want to.

Me: Ok.

David: If it need to.

Me: Yeah. Fine. So, just one moment I am just going to look for to other questions. Perfect.

David: Yeah.

Me: So, moving on to question 6 again on the new survey which asks "Based on your experience as a learner which of the following statements best reflects what your school has tried to teach you over the past 3 years. Please tick one box from the list provided below." So,

David the box which you ticked said "To get good grades in general." Could you perhaps tell me a little more about why you chose that box?

David: Well like I said about different students they try and get different things out of you like to try and create a good citizen out of maybe a student who may show to be a bad one in the future but if they already seem to be quite academically good children they will try and teach you to have good grades which I believe I fall into that category of trying to, the teachers are trying to get me to have good grades and preparing me for careers in the future.

Me: Ok. So, there is as you stated in your view from a teacher's point of view.

David: Yeah.

Me: Different perhaps students or learners and they will perhaps change their teaching abilities to suit those students.

David: Exactly.

Me: Ok. And do you view it as strictly the two camps that you mentioned so those who can only be turned into better citizens versus those and/or those who can become future workers or.

David: Well it is the only one I can think of. Sometimes they mightn't even try sometimes it depends on the person or teacher. They will just say I am not going to bother with them and send them outside or something. Waste 5 minutes of the class, they can stand outside for the rest.

Me: Yeah. Ok. So, question no. 8. Your 3 favourite subjects which you chose from the table listed were biology, metalwork and physical education. Could you perhaps tell me a little more as to why they are your favourite subjects?

David: Well, metalwork I chose because it was close to technology. I enjoy the, I enjoy working with my hands as well as. See back in the first year when I was choosing my options, when I went into first year before tasters I was planning on choosing business, French and eh

technical graphics but I decided to technology instead of tech graphics because see I wanted to do something with my hands but like going in I thought it was for less academically well performing students because you know I just thought it was all practical but after the tasters I realised there was actually stuff you had to study so it was best of both worlds where I could study and I could also work with my hands as well. And then biology I do find, I just find it the most interesting science subject out of all of them. That's really the best I can say. And em physical education it really depends, I like staying fit obviously em with my running career and there are parts of it I don't like. Like I don't really like team sports but I enjoy playing with the guys outside I am not sure if I would like it as a exam subject per se.

Me: Ok.

David: But I am not really sure as I don't have experience in the exam subject part of that.

Me: Do you plan to pursue it as an exam subject for leaving cert?

David: I am considering it cos I have a huge problem with the only picking 4 type thing. Cos I still want to see with my grades coming back. Like I don't really enjoy business but I think I did really well in it so I am not sure if I would like to pick that up. I would just like to consider my options.

Me: Ok. So receiving you results this week will?

David: Help.

Me: Perhaps. Ok. Next question. Question no. 14 asks "Over the past 3 years of learning have you noticed any extra attention given to certain subjects in school based on their importance in getting a job. Example being told that some subjects are more likely than others to help you to get a job than others when you leave school."

David: Em.

Me: You chose "A combination of the above". Which is a combination of commerce, humanities and STEM subjects.

David: Em

Me: Why did you choose that answer?

David: Because look like a lot of the commerce subjects are good for em like getting jobs in banks and stuff and STEM is good for em getting jobs in either engineering or science so it is two different fields of work and the humanitarians can get jobs as teachers for any single one of them so I think any of them work, work for them. I don't think there is one specific one better than the other.

Me: Ok. Grand. Question 16 David. Em related to question 14 asks "Over the past 3 years of learning", take your time, "Over the past 3 years of learning have you felt that pressure has been put on you in school to chose certain subjects for senior cycle or for the leaving cert? So please pick one box from the list provided below." Again you chose "A combination of the above". So, my question to you is what type of pressure have you experienced?

David: See it really depends on different people like I remember like I have been told David you do really well in this subject you should pick this one over this or em like I didn't do music for junior cert but my drum teacher is saying I could do really well considering it is 50% of the practical so I wouldn't have to do well in the sorry, I wouldn't have to do as well in the written exam because I could already have 50% on my hands so it is quite easy to get points. But it depends on the person. Like I remember I was expecting to be put a lot of pressure on to pick languages because you know courses and everything but surprisingly there wasn't much there but em it really differs I think.

Me: Differs, depending on what?

David: Yeah. Depending on what people you are talking to like from talking to a business teacher they will be trying to convince me to pick business as a subject or if I am talking to a relative with a eh job with something to do with medicine they will be kind of persuading me to maybe pick chemistry or biology.

Me: And in school if and when you happen to speak with certain teachers of certain subjects em why do you think they are trying to persuade you to pick that subject?

David: They like me.

Me: They like you?

David: Ah no. Em. Yeh I think they would like to get more people in their subject. I feel that is the job of a teacher to get people interested in their subject and to teach them about it.

Me: Ok. Yeah. Fine.

David: I don't think a teacher should be going against their own subject.

Me: True and that seems to stand to reason.

David: Yeah.

Me: Looking forward then David to question 18. *Papers shuffling*.

David: Yeah.

Me: So, I am sorry question 18 and 19. So question 19 "Which of the following subject options are you most like to choose for senior cycle?" Please tick one from one box from the list provided below. You chose "A combination of the above". So again a combination of STEM, humanities and commerce and when asked "Why you are most likely to choose these subjects" for question 19 you stated "I am most likely to choose these subjects because a combination of my skill in these subjects and how easy it is to earn points in them. The leaving cert is a points game so I am in it to win it."   So, could you please elaborate on that? What do you mean by the leaving cert is a points game? So I am in it to win it.

David: I mean like, like I was saying I was considering music for em, as an example I was considering picking music because I actually did the leaving cert exam with my drum teacher because like he has done it with other students who have done the course. So he gave me the

course and he said I had nearly got full marks which is 50% already. So even if I do terrible in the leaving cert like written exam for music I will still have already gotten a H5 nearly. So, even if I do get very little in that test I can still probably get a H4 easily.

Me: Ok.

David: No matter what.

Me: So? [inquisitive pause].

David: So, sorry. So yeah it would be easier than getting points in a subject like say chemistry because I would have to be studying at least 60% with everything very well to get a H4.

Me: Ok. So, if I am understanding you correctly and please feel free to contradict me. You are suggesting that in some way this is based on how easy it is to gain points in certain subjects.

David: Yes. See I will pick it in in a subject I am interested in and something now if I do decide what career I want I will pick the ones that I need to get that but, say I pick a career where I only need actually need 2 subjects that aren't maths, English or Irish I will just pick the two subjects I am most likely to get the most points in.

Me: Ok. And on that related note, when do you think you will know or what factors do you think will influence your decision about what career you are going to choose.

David: Honestly I am not sure. I am not sure if I want, I am don't really want to be stuck behind a desk but I am not really sure what I else I want to do so I haven't decided yet and I am not sure when I will decide. I am just hoping I will decide before I have to choose my options for 5th year.

Me: Ok. When do you have to choose your options for 5th year or has that been a school discussion already?

David: I am assuming the same time as the people who went from 3rd year to 5th year did last year so maybe like 2 months or a month before the junior cert so close to the end of the year.

Me: So you hope to have some stronger indication as to which career you choose before then.

David: Yeah.

Me: Are there any other factors which would inform that decision?.

David: Well see if I haven't decided yet I am looking at picking like biology cos I am interested in it, technology because I am interested in it and I do find it quite easy with the you know it is practical as well and the exam is quite easy as well. And I have looked at my brother's em, my brother did technology for leaving cert and it has the least jump in difficulty from eh junior to the senior cycle. So, it would be quite easy to get points in that.

Me: Ok. No problem. Moving on then to question no, and I will just check my sheet (papers shuffling). Yes, question no 24.

David: Ok.

Me: And I just want to compare this on the new questionnaire.

David: Yes sure.

Me: *Papers shuffling*. Yes. Ok. So, this is looking at 2 questions David. Questions no. 23 and 24. So question no. 23 asks "Thinking about your experience of secondary school over the past 3 years which subjects would you say are most like to help a person to get a job after school? Please tick one box from the list provided below". You chose "A combination of the above". So, again a combination of STEM, humanities and commerce. Looking then to question 24 you were asked "Why do you think these subjects are most likely to help a person to get a job after school?" You said "I believe all of these subjects can get you a job you an teach any subject". Can you comment any more on that?

David: Look like if they are being told in school they have to get you something and I don't think one outweighs the other. It depends on the student what they want to do. So, like I said

you can teach any subject so if it is being taught in school you an get a job with it so I don't think one outweighs the other for a subject for a job.

Me: So in terms of knowledge or value of knowledge you view it as an almost equal balance.

David: It really depends on who you are.

Me: Ok. Looking forward then David to question 28.

David: Yeah.

Me: It says "Based on your own current understanding which subject, worry word missing, word omitted, which subject do you believe a qualification in is most likely to help a person to get a profession job or career after school?"

David: Sorry which question is this did you say?

Me: This is on the new survey.

David: Oh ok right.

Me: So, apologies. So, on the new survey again it says "Based on your own current understanding which subjects would you believe a qualification in is most likely to help a person to get a profession job or career after school? So for example a certificate, a diploma or college degree resulting in a skilled profession." Please tick one box from the list provided below." So, David you chose, you ticked commerce.

David: Yeah. Sorry looking back on that, yes looking back on my old test, I probably would choose a combination from below based on what I said earlier. As I say in the next part about commerce it does. I do think it is influenced to get a job in commerce because bank, people who work in banks it is quite an honest job and you do get paid quite well so it, I think it would be quite encouraged to get a job there.

Me: Ok. So, linking into that then question 29. "Why do you think a qualification in these subjects is most likely to help a person to get a professional job or career after school/" You said "All subjects involving the bank or a career can lead to a steady career in my opinion". So, what's you opinion based on there, is that based on?

David: Yeh. Like I said you can easily, sorry not easily, it is quite rewarding if you can get a job in a bank or if you want to work in a school or you want to work for a company working at their finances and it is quite, generally though quite well paid. They are not em, it is quite a good job to have in my opinion I think.

Me: Ok. Grand. So, nearing the end of now David and there are just two further questions I would like to ask you. So, question no. 26, 25 and 26, 25 asks "Have you attended any careers days or received a careers talk in school or on a school trip over the past 3 years?" You said "I cant remember". Having briefly discussed this with you and the other assistant researchers upon review of said survey em you recalled that you had in fact attended one of these careers days recently. So, I just wanted to offer you the opportunity to review or keep your answer the same, which subjects did these events focus on? Please tick one box from the list provided below.

David: I can, you see the thing is, I went to it, so yeh I did attend one but it wasn't a very good one per se. You couldn't hear a lot of the things the people doing the presentations could say so you were really just reading off a board and then it was kind of good walking around the stands and everything but they really varied between all of these, like there was some stuff on the military, there was some stuff on An Gaisce. I didn't really enjoy it. It wasn't very helpful for anything. It didn't teach me anything new. So, that's why I wrote I cannot remember as I didn't really have any thing to say about it really.

Me: Ok. Fine. And just to clarify and that is perfectly ok, so you felt that it touched, this one particularly careers event that you recently attended touched off em commerce, humanities and STEM.

David: I think so.

Me: And were there any other careers days, guest speakers who have come in.

David: We never went on a careers day. I don't think maybe there were guest speakers in back last year, I can't remembers years before that, not that I can recall.

Me: Ok. Fine. And final question then David. Two part question again. So, question no. 28 asks "Are you likely to study higher level mathematics at senior cycle or at your leaving cert? Please tick one box from the list provided below". You ticked "Yes".

David: Yes.

Me: And for question no. 29 then it says "Is this decision influenced by the incentive of bonus points?" You again ticked "Yes". So could you please tell me more about your decision to choose higher level mathematics and your motivation?

David: Yes see look my view is I think I did alright in maths like obviously a lot of people don't do well in maths, it is probably one of the most difficult subjects in school a lot of people would find. So, I do plan to attempt higher levels maths until at least the Christmas exams in 5th year. I don't plan to drop down but I would like to keep them on until 6th year at least to see if can actually keep up. If I cannot I don't mind dropping down and trying to do better in ordinary than getting the points in leaving cert but it would be very hopeful obviously. So, if I am doing decently in class and doing decently in the tests I am happy to do it for leaving cert.

Me: And to clarify on or in relation to question 29 you are tempted or encouraged by the prospect of gaining extra bonus points for attempting higher level maths.

David: Yeah. Yeah. Cos like it is 2 more grades up isn't?

Me: Yeah.

David: 25 points is it. It is two more grades up so.

Me: And on a related note could you possibly inform me, if you can remember, where did you learn or where did you get the information that you could gain bonus points for higher level maths? Is that something you learned in school or?

David: My em, my brother em did his leaving cert so it was kinda me just watching him doing it. So, I knew he did higher level maths anyway so he did get the bonus points.

Me: Ok. So, final question and I just want, just while I think of it, so this is not a scripted question but just one which has sprung to mind. Based on your impression overall of this questionnaire, this survey that you have taken, would you think that other students in the year, friends or just other peers in general, em out of your whole year group, do you think that their answers would mostly be similar to yours, do you think that they would be very dissimilar to yours? What would you expect?

David: I am not very sure. I don't really give my opinion on this type of stuff very often. Em. I like to keep my opinion down low a lot of the time you know just in case it is controversial or something like that. But em I am not sure, maybe some people would, some people wouldn't compare.

Me: And I want to focus in on one question in particular which is on the new survey.

David: Got it.

Me: And it is, im im im, hear with me one moment, new survey. Yes so, question 3 on the new survey which asks "Which of the following statements best reflects your motivation to learn in school? Please tick one box from the list provided below". Again we have already covered this question and you answered "To prove that I can".

David: Yes.

Me: Just in relation to that question, if you were to survey everyone else in your year group in transition year which answer, if any, do you think that they would give? Do you feel that their answer is likely similar to your own or if you were to base your impression of these people and of their experience at school over the last couple of years, similar to your own experience, what do you think they might say?

David: I think a lot of people would say get good grades because teachers do do em obviously encourage that but like my motivation to learn is generally if I want to do well in exam, in an exam that I want to keep up, I will, that's my motivation to get good grades but like I said to prove that I can for subjects like history and geography that I am not interested in, that I might keep on. So I would say that answer for the others is unique so I am not sure many people would do it for that point.

Me: And to clarify when you said to get good grades there are 2 options there. So, do you think most of the people would say to get good grades in general or to get good grades so that I can get a good college course/career/job.

David: Well in general it falls into the college course so yeh I would say it depends on what they are looking for so yeh I would probably say in general.

Me: Ok.

David: People would choose.

Me: So in your view people most likely at motivated to learn in general eh about new information, new things without the specific motivation of definitely aiming towards a career or course, job, diploma.

David: Maybe the, some people might have an interest in some subjects and they might view it as that. Yeh maybe they would actually view it as getting a career or a job. Em. So yeh I picked the career or a job one because like yeh like I said some people would find school interesting but I doubt many students would come here if they didn't definitely, if it didn't help you get a job or anything.

Me: Ok. So, in some, if you were to ask, if I were to ask you do people learn for the sake of learning or do they learn for a specific purpose, which option would you choose?

David: Probably for a specific purpose honestly. Like to try and get a job or to try and impress people or to prove they can like I said.

Me: Ok. No problem. David thank you very much for your time and that formally concludes our interview.

Interview with Assistant Researcher 5: 'Damien'

Me: Ok so I am here with Damien. Damien thank you for taking the time after school to stay behind and discuss this with me. Em Damien I am going to begin by asking you about question No. 1 on the original survey. So, Damien eh on the original survey question No. 1 asks you "Why do you think you think people learn in general?". You wrote "It might aid them in a future career such as practising the piano can help while pursuing a career in music." So, my question for you is, is all learning job or career related?

Damien: Well not all learning, obviously there are some types of learning say ehhh kicking a football, something as mundane as that like even though that can be helpful in like a career in you know football eh its merely just something you can have fun doing you know.

Me: Ok. So, question No. 2 then, "Why do you think people learn in school?" You wrote "It would help them when choosing a career in a common path such as an office worker or a construction worker and if they excel, they can get careers in high level positions such as a bank manager or a doctor." So, my question for you then, is there any other reason people might learn in school aside from career related goals?

Damien: No.

Me: No?

Damien: No.

Me: So, in your, can you tell me more about that?

Damien: Em.

Me: Why do you believe that?

Damien: Well it is as simple as what else are you going to do with that knowledge? Like, cos if you are not going to use in in a career then what is the point in possessing that type of knowledge?

Me: Ok. So, linking that to question No. 3 which is on the new survey, em, "Which of the following statements best reflects your motivation to learn in school. Please tick one box from the list provided below". It says, you chose "To get good grades so that I can get a good college course, career or job." So, to clarify and that seems to match up with what you just mentioned now, the reason why you learn is to possess knowledge which you can use to get a career or job.

Damien: Yeh.

Me: Is there any other purpose eh for possessing knowledge for you or for learning for you aside from a career or job?

Damien: No.

Me: Ok, that's your primary motivation?

Damien: Yeah.

Me: Ok. Question No. 4 on the new survey, eh "What do you think the purpose of school is in general? Please tick one box from the list provided below". You chose "To create good citizens". Eh ok could you please tell me more about why you chose that?

Damien: Well its just so that its easier for say the government to like control stuff so they won't have to pay as much for public services such as the Gardai because obviously there won't be as many like well public eh, forget the word, public order (banging in the background).

Me: Take your time.

Damien: Yeah.

Me: Go on. So let me think, if they keep people, if people become good people good citizens then there would be less crime and less social problems and that kind of thing.

Damien: Social problems yeah.

Me: Yeah. Absolutely. Fair. So, question no. 5 then again new survey asks "What do you think the purpose of school should be? Please tick one box from the list provided below". You wrote, you ticked "A combination of the above". So, in other words for you the purpose of school should be to create well informed people, to create good citizens, to get good grades in general and to get good grades so that people can get good college courses, careers or jobs. Could you tell me more about why you chose that?

Damien: Well like I chose it because obviously they want well informed people so that they don't choose say a political party that could ruin, well like the government, cos there are some parties out there that will, from my knowledge, there are some parties that would ruin progress made by prior parties so some could be building more houses and that the next party could you know stop construction on that. An then I chose to create good citizens as my other answer you know just so that it is cheaper for social services. (Door banging). And then to get good grades in general em cos the school should be in charge of well the child's education so you know that they are better off in like.

Me: Ok. And just to be clear this is what you think the purpose of school should be?

Damien: Yeah.

Me: Yeah. Just to make sure. Ok, no problem. (people talking in the background). So, question No. 6 following on "Based on your experience of learning and as a learner, which of the following statements best reflects what your school has tried to teach you over the past 3 years. (Girls talking in the background and making noise). Please tick one box from the list provided below". So you chose "How to be a good citizen." So, could you tell me more about your experience of school and how eh you have come to that conclusion, or why you have come to view it that way?

Damien: Yeah. So every time *(doors banging)* say I am in class *(loud talking in room)* or out on the corridor or in the canteen em if I do something say like do what's considered bad to the teachers like throwing paper so I am told not to do that so I wouldn't do that later on and I have never been like, I have never felt that a teacher has paid attention to me to like the point where like I can excel in some subjects and I well I just felt like it was more of an option because I was torn between the two here.

Me: How to be a well-informed person.

Damien: Yes.

Me: And how to be a good citizen? Ok you struggled to make up your mind. So, eh if you were to go back and expand upon the first one which you didn't use "How to be a well-informed person" em you think that's the secondary objective of what school has taught you over the last couple of years.

Damien: Yeah.

Me: Yeah, eh so kind of how to be well rounded or know a little about a lot maybe? Ok. Fine. So, moving on to question No. 7 which is on the original (Damien coughing) survey. Em, I just want to clarify myself. Question 6 and 7 on the original survey. Em question 6 asks "Thinking about your experience of secondary school over the past 3 years, which subjects have you enjoyed learning about the most?" You chose "The humanities". Em so linking that to my question based on question no. 7, "Why did you enjoy learning about these subjects the most." You wrote "I feel that they have more value to any future careers that I may do." So again, just I guess for the record eh your motivations for learning are primarily career motivated. Eh.

Damien: Yes. Yeah.

Me: Which is fine but you have also pointed out or you yourself have said or raised the question of what's the point of possessing any knowledge em you know unless it serves a future career or what have you. But you have chosen that based on your experience school has taught you

how to be a good citizen and how to be a well-informed person. In other words forms of knowledge which aren't directly related to any career or job.

Damien: Em.

Me: Em so could you tell me a little or I will just phrase my question carefully. Em. *(footsteps in the background and a door closing).* Is, has schooling done its job for you so far then in your view if it hasn't taught you primarily how to get a job or career but it has taught you how to eh be a well-informed person and a good citizen? Has the, has schooling done what you think it should do? (Voices in the background).

Damien: Eh yes.

Me: It has? Ok. Eh why do you think it has or why has it done its job?

Damien: Ehhh. *(doors banging).*

Me: For you personally and no one else?

Damien: Ehh. *(Loud banging in the background).* Just can, can I just take a drink of water?

Me: Yeah, of course you can absolutely. *(footsteps and a bag being opened, more doors banging, generally noisy).* Let's move on from that question and we will look at question No. 8 on the new survey.

Damien: The new survey.

Me: Yeh. So it says blah blah blah, eh you have been asked to tick your 3 favourite subjects in school so far and you have chosen, geography, history and eh technical graphics. Could you please tell me a little bit (doors banging) about what they are your favourite subjects?

Damien: Eh geography is my favourite subject because well its one of my like *(doors banging)* stronger subjects basically *(kids laughing in the background).* History I like it because my family was directly involved in World War II and technical graphics because well I am

interested in pursuing a career in architecture so evolving on to TCG and then on to architecture.

Me: Ok. *(Laughing in background).* And that links neatly to question No. 9 which asks about "Which subjects have you enjoyed learning about the most in school?" Eh you have again ticked "humanites" which mirrors eh your 3 favourites subjects. Em so let's bring that on to question No. 13 on the new survey eh which asks "Are your strongest subjects also the same as your favourite subjects?" You chose "Most of the time". So, are there subjects which you are good at but they are not your favourite?

Damien: Eh yes.

Me: Ok. Which would those be?

Damien: They would be maths and CSPE.

Me: Ok.

Damien: We no longer do CSPE so and then maths I don't like doing mainly because of the pressure that is put upon me because I am always told that you have to get you know really well in maths if you want to do anything else.

Me: Ok. Eh can I ask where is that pressure coming from, is that from school?

Damien: Eh.

Me: At home, society?

Damien: Mostly from school and sometimes at home.

Me: Ok. And in school, so leaving home aside, in school where would that pressure come from?

Damien: The pressure would usually come from subjects that will really needs maths, like say eh technology because you need formulas for gears and what not. Technical graphics because you need to know like Pythagoras theorem and well maths itself because you know they are teaching maths.

Me: Naturally. And just to be more clear, is the pressure coming specifically from the teachers of those subjects?

Damien: Eh its more of like 75/25. Like its 75 from the teachers and 25 from me just say like thinking to myself I really need to know maths for this.

Me: Ok. Yeah. Ok. So moving on to question No. eh 13 on the original survey. *(papers shuffling)*. "Thinking about your experience of secondary school over the past 3 years which subjects would you say teachers think are the most important in school? Please tick one box from the list provided below". You chose "STEM". So, my question is why do you think this?

Damien: Well because STEM has maths involved and I was torn between STEM or commerce.

Me: Ok.

Damien: Because well I have always like had, before I came into the school, the business studies was a core subject, you couldn't like choose it as an option and eh well it was gone when I entered year first year and so I was torn between either picking that or STEM. I picked STEM because it has maths and I just feel like *(talking in the background)* well any teacher that is involved in maths, biology, chemistry, physics, my science teacher is always trying to say that well these are obviously more important to you than anything else. And then maths obviously like I said before I just have pressure on me.

Me: Ok. Eh question No. 14 on the original survey "Over the past 3 years or learning have you noticed any extra attention eh being given to certain subjects in school based on their importance of getting a job?" You chose "Yes" and subsequently when asked which one eh you chose "STEM" so I realise that this sounds like a rephrasing of what we just discussed but in what ways have you noticed extra attention being given to these subjects? Is it just mathematics or eh would you also add science?

Damien: Yes.

Me: technology or engineering.

Damien: Just maths because there is well, from my experience in 3rd year, there was no after school clubs for like English, there was no after school clubs for geography or history but there was (doors banging) but there was a club for maths and em at the time I felt like my English was you know pretty bad so I tried to like eh like ask the teacher if there was any after school stuff to which he said there was no so I basically just started like studying more and more in own free time eh English while there was just a maths club that was I think on every day in school so. (laughing in background).

Me: Ok. Moving on to question NO. 15, let me see, yeh 15 on the original survey. So, leading to the last question "Based on your experience over the past 3 years of learning which subjects do you think are the most employable.?" You chose "STEM". Why did you choose STEM?

Damien: I meant to actually pick commerce for this one.

Me: No problem.

Damien: I just.

Me: No problem you can change your answer.

Damien: Yeah. So commerce. I think well these ones are more employable because it is accounting, business studies and economics and that is pretty much what you need to have if you want to become an office worker like for firm or an insurance company I don't know what there is for eh business but I just feel like that is more employable to me.

Me: Ok. Question No. 16 we have more or less covered. Eh 17. Question No. 17 on the original survey asks "Which of the following do you think would be the most important factors when choosing your subjects for senior cycle". You chose one box which said "Choosing

subjects which will lead to a career that I really want because it pays a lot of money". Why did you choose this option?

Damien: Well eh I chose it because it will lead me to a career that I want and it pays a lot of money. I just. I feel that's at

Me: Ok I will clarify that happily. So, which would you say appeals to you more, a career that you really, if you were given the choice between the two, a career that you really want or earning a lot of money?

Damien: A career that I really want.

Me: Ok. You would choose that over earning a lot of money. Emm if I could ask is money an important motivation to you?

Damien: Emm well.

Me: If you could get a career that you really wanted but you knew that it wouldn't pay you a huge amount of money would you still pursue that career?

Damien: If it meant a chance where I could get a like a promotion or a chance to get a better career with like the same baseline like say I want to do something involving English I didn't get paid much for but if I stayed with that job for a while and then I was given the chance to move up to a higher position where it would offer me a lot of money but it was like the same core subject like I would do that.

Me: And what if there was no chance for a higher progression so if you knew that you would spend your whole life doing the same thing which you enjoyed but at no point are you ever going to earn significantly more money , would you still choose that career?

Damien: Yes I would.

Me: Ok. Question No. (loud talking in the background). Let me see just to double check, ok, question No. 19 on the new survey (papers shuffling) asks "Over the past 3 years of learning

blah blah blah, actually I am just going to, that's a rephrasing of another question so I can leave that. Emmm that's fine. Question No. ? I can leave that. *(Coughing).* So good we are down to the last few questions. So, moving on to question No. 29 on the new survey *(papers shuffling)*, "Based on your own current understanding a qualification in which subject is most like to help a person to get a professional job or career after school e.g. certification, diploma, college degree resulting in a skilled profession? ". You chose "I think that they are all equally likely to help people get a profession job or career". Why do you think that?

Damien: Well after rereading the question I realise now that I meant, I think this would be the best choice, commerce.

Me: Ok. No problem. You are allowed to change your answer, that is not a problem. So why commerce.

Damien: Well commerce I feel is a more like suited option because it has economics, business studies and accounting all of which I find are more like higher up jobs because well obviously the CEO of a company obviously wouldn't like have no knowledge of what they are doing. They would obviously need some sort of like high degree of knowledge if they want to like well have a good working company.

Me: Yeah. Ok. So, question 30. "Why do you think a qualification in these subjects dah dah dah, actually no you have more or less answered that so that's fine. So just one more listed question to ask you and then I just might have one or two follow-ups. So, question No. 36 "Will your junior cycle results affect your subject choices for the leaving cert?" You chose "Yes". Could you please tell me why, you received your results on Friday, I personally don't know how they went and you don't need to tell me emm but in what way would they, will they affect your choices for the leaving cert?

Damien: Well, because if I have a subject that say I don't like but I got a low grade in then obviously I would drop that subject and say I got a subjection where I got a high grade in and I really like I would keep that. So, it is kind of a win win I suppose.

Me: True. Let me ask you this then, so, and this will relate to to something you said earlier, if you had a subject which you didn't like but you are really good at would you choose that subject anyway?

Damien: Ehhh no.

Me: No?

Damien: No.

Me: How come?

Damien: Well obviously if I don't like it then I am not going to give like my 100% effort into it and then my performance in it would start to degrade over and over, over again because I would just find it like more and more well tedious I suppose.

Me: And what if you, what if you add a subject that you didn't particularly like, you were really good at and you knew that you could do pretty well in the leaving cert with little effort, so in other words it wouldn't become tedious, you could do well, would you choose that subject knowing that it would be an easy attempt to gain leaving cert points?

Damien: Knowing that it would be easy yes I would.

Me: Ok. Eh Damien I just have 3 or 4 more short follow-up questions I would like to ask you. Eh based on your comments around mathematics emm and commerce I note that you said that you won't be choosing higher level maths for the leaving cert, is that correct?

Damien: Yes.

Me: Is there any particular reason?

Damien: Mainly because I just find maths just, I don't like it and I am not that good at it so I just won't be doing higher level.

Me: Fine. Next question, *(papers shuffling)* just going back to the original survey, emm at the beginning I just want to return to question No., actually for the new survey *(Overhead intercom goes off)* I should clarify. For question NO. 3 on the new survey *(papers shuffling)* asks "Which of the following statements best reflects your motivation to learn in school. Please tick one box from the list provided below". Again you ticked "To get good grades so that I can get a good college course, career or job". So we have already discussed this, my question to you is do you think that most of the people in your year group eh sorry if we were to survey most of the people or all other people in your year group which option do you think they would choose?

Damien: Probably either eh this or this mainly because people are more interested in the result of you learning like because obviously, they want good grades and they wouldn't mind not knowing this or this.

Me: Ok, so just to clarify for the purpose of the audio Damien chose to get good grades in general or to get good grades so that I can get a good college course, career or job as the two most likely options which other students in the year group would choose in his option. Emm ok Damien final question, emm going back to something you said earlier, you said that one of your favourite subjects at the moment *(Damien coughs)* based on the last few years of learnings is CSPE which you have indicated correctly is not a subject you can take for the leaving cert. So, my question is, eh do you think CSPE should be offered for the leaving cert?

Damien: No because well I think it should be but it should be like more to like a more serious more mature version because obviously CSPE will help you with choosing say *(kids talking in the background)* a political party later on in life and to be more involved in your community because well that's important (banging in the background).

Me: Ok. And then on a related note why do you think CSPE isn't offered for the leaving cert? If you were to take a guess?

Damien: I am not entirely sure. I em I don't know. I couldn't say for the life of me.

Me: Ok. No problem. So Damien, thank you so much for your time today and for staying back after school. I really do appreciate it and for your honestly and directness in all of the answers.

Appendix F:

This appendix presents copies of the research worksheets that were provided to the assistant researchers as part of their training for the empirical study. The completed version of these worksheets have not been included because they contain personal details about the identities of the student researchers.

Research Worksheet 1

Name:

Date:

Guiding Questions

- How do students speak to people who are older than them in school?
- What do students wear?
- What rules exist around what students wear?
- What way do students keep their hair?
- What rules exist around hair for students?
- What way are classrooms laid out?
- Where is the teacher positioned throughout the lesson?
- What type of behaviour is encouraged?
- What type of behaviour is discouraged?
- What types of posters are on the corridor walls around the school?
- How long are lessons?
- What other school rules have you noticed?
- Why do these rules exist?
- What happens to students when they break these rules?

What I observed:

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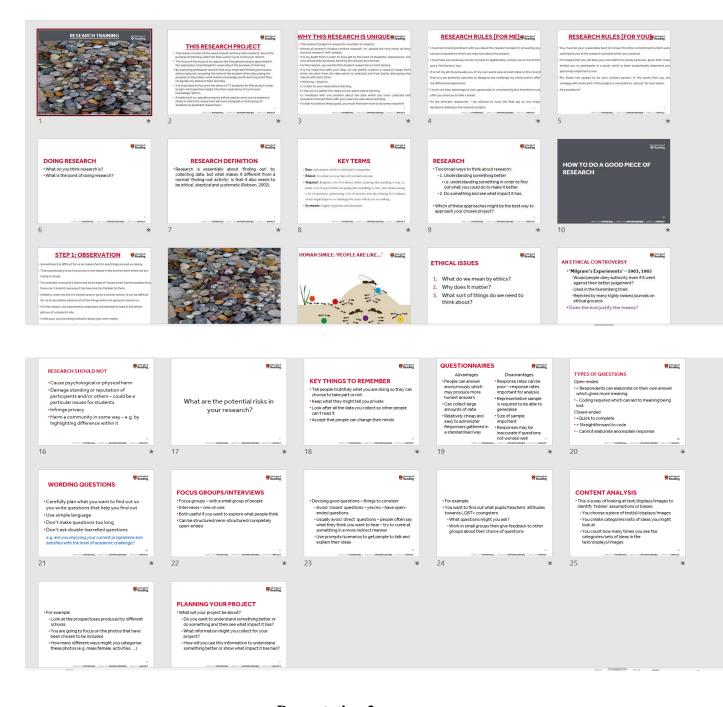-

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Post-Observation questions:

- What type of messages do you think schooling is sending students? Why?

    - What is the purpose of schooling in society?

    - What is the purpose of learning in schooling?

Research Worksheet 2

Name:

Date:

Factors which affect/influence Secondary Schools in the Republic of Ireland:

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-
-
-
-

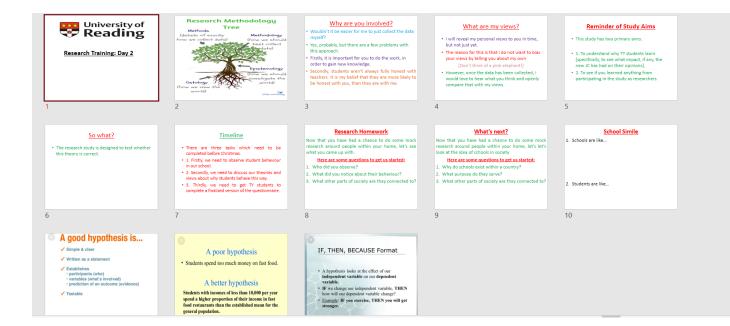| Schools are like:	Students are like:

The reason I think this is:

Appendix G:

This appendix presents an overview of the qualitative research training presentations which were shown to the assistant researchers in preparation for their involvement in the empirical study.
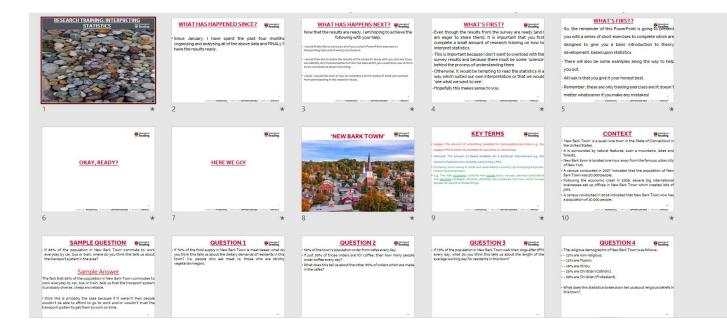
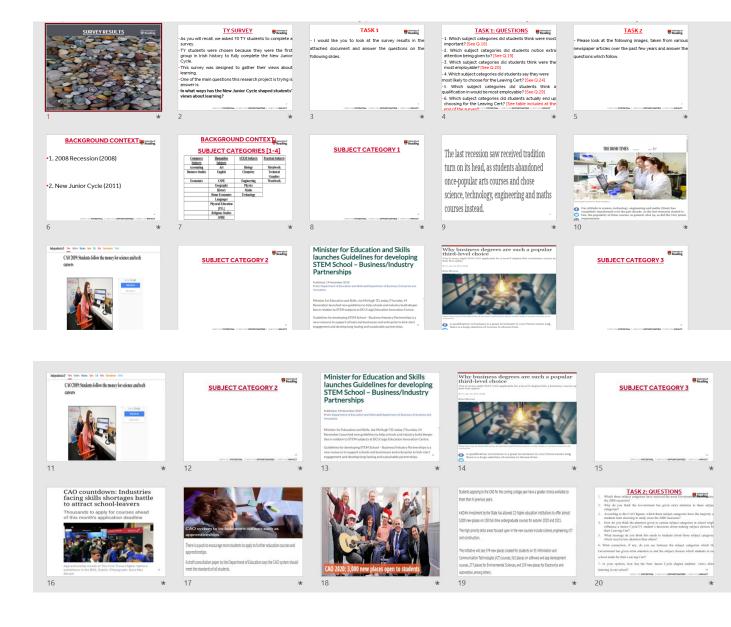**Presentation 1**

Presentation 2

Appendix H:

This appendix presents an overview of the quantitative research training presentations which were shown to the assistant researchers as part of their involvement in the empirical study.

Presentation 1

Presentation 2

Appendix I:

This appendix presents the responses which were given by the assistant researchers to the questions which were posed to them about the data statistics on the final slide of the second presentation on quantitative research.

Research Project Answers 1: Brian

Task 1: Questions

1. 33% believed humanities were most important.

2. 32% said that they had noticed extra attention given to STEM subjects in school.

3. 21% said they thought STEM subjects are the most professionally employable and 21% said they thought a combination of subjects are the most professionally employable.

4. 38% said that they were most likely to choose humanities subjects for the Leaving Cert.

5. 21% said that a qualification in STEM is most likely to help a person get a professional job/career after school.

6. Commerce 17 (24%)

    STEM 70 (100%)

    Humanities 82 (117%)

    Practical Subjects 50 (70%)

Task 2: Questions

1. Commerce, STEM and Practical Subjects.

2. Because these subjects get the government more money.

3. Commerce, STEM and Practical Subjects.

4. Giving more attention to certain subjects will convince JC students to pick these subjects for the LC.

5. They are less important and will not get them a job in the future.

6. Most students picked the subjects that the government gave priority to.

7. Yes I think it has.

Research Project Answers 2: Tim

Task 1: Questions

1. 33% said they thought that humanities subjects are the most important in school.

2. 32% said that they had noticed extra attention given to STEM subjects in school, based on their importance in getting a professional job/career.

3. 21% said they thought STEM subjects are the most professionally employable.

4. 38 % said that they were most likely to choose humanities subjects for the Leaving Cert.

5. 21% said that a qualification in STEM is most likely to help a person get a professional job/career after school.

6. - Commerce 8 (11%) 17 (24%) 1 (1%)

   - STEM 4 (6%) 70 (100%) 25 (36%)

   - Practical Subjects 16 (24%) 50 (70%) 19 (27%)

   - Humanities 26 (38%) 82 (117%) 25 (36%)

Task 2: Questions

1. Science, Technology, and Maths (STEM).

2. So you could become a, industrial Psychologist , a Software Developer , or a Acoustic Consultant.

3. Science, Technology, and Maths (STEM).

4. It would influence the students about choosing these certain subjects, because they might believe that it would give them a good scholarship in a college, or that their parents did these subjects so they might want to follow in their parents footsteps.

5. The message could tell them, they could do even greater in these subjects and they could play a major part in getting you a good job with a good amount of payment.

6. It's due to the fact that these subject categories are connected to jobs that have very good payment such as, an industrial Psychologist, a Software Developer and an Acoustic Consultant .etc. I researched these jobs, and they are some of the top jobs that appear under the name of the specific subject, and these jobs play a very big part in getting the government paid too.

Research Project Answers 3: Richard

Task 1: Questions

1. Students seemed to pick humanities as the most important category, I believe this to be because they more than likely think that they need a third language to get into a good college course.

2. Students noticed extra care put into STEM subjects, I believe this has got to do with the government wanting people to be employed in this sector of work.

3. Students said that STEM seems the most employable, which would directly correlate with the answer in question

4. Students said that they would choose Humanities, which would correlate to my answer in answer 1.

5. Students said that a career in STEM subjects would be most employable, for those in the audience who don't get it a clear pattern is starting to emerge.

6. 100% of students chose STEM subjects, I assume this has got to do with them thinking that a career in STEM would be very employable.

Task 2: Questions

1. I hate to sound like a broken record, but STEM subjects seem to be the way to go, funding was given to these subjects. The governments focus was on arts beforehand

2. I personally think that funding was given to these subjects because the government thought that these subjects would be highly employable and would bring a great amount of money to the economy

3. Students had mostly been picking humanities subjects, I assume this would be for self interest

4. I would assume that if students saw that there was extra attention given to certain subjects then that might get student into the mindset that the subjects with more attention would be easier than the ones without that extra bit of attention

5. I would assume that it sends the message of "If you pick these subjects then you're gonna have a bad time"

6. I have noticed a connection that the subjects that have gotten extra credit are also the subjects that most students have chosen

7. I think that student's views of school are that they use it solely for career purposes instead of using it for subjects that they have a genuine interest in, ergo students will do what they think is employable instead of doing things that they have interest in.

Research Project Answers 4: David

Task 1: Questions

1. 33% of students believed humanities were the most important in school. The next highest was 24% who believed that a combination of all types of subjects were equally important. If you look at the jump in percentage from the students who picked a preference of one over the other there's a 23% difference from the highest to the next highest who choose a preference of one over the other showing a pretty big jump between humanities and the other types of subjects. Especially if you compare it to the 3% jump from stem to practical subjects.

2. 32% percent of students had noticed extra attention towards stem subjects in school based on importance of getting a professional job/career. There is not that big of a jump in percentage between answers in this question they just keep getting smaller from highest percentage to the lowest. There is a 21% difference between the highest and lowest however the two outliers would be the two biggest and I would barley even call the outliers. They just have a slightly bigger jump. Based on this most students would say stem and humanities are given the most attention compared to practical and commerce.

3. The results to this question were fairly close together with a number of people choosing each of the options besides one. The only big outlier here were the people who said they were unsure of which subjects were the most professionally employable with only 4%. All the other five options to the question had similar results between 16% and 21%.

4. There is a large number of jumps in percentages for this question. The two largest groups are humanities with 38% and practical subjects with 24%. Forgetting about the jumps most people are sure what subjects they want to pick as only 3% said they were unsure of which subjects they were most likely to do for the leaving cert.

5. The jumps in percentages in the answers for this question are pretty close together. The highest jump in the entire question is between the highest(Stem subjects with 21%) and second highest(Practical subjects with 16%) with only a 5% difference. My reason to believe that the

answers in this question are so close together is if you have a good qualification in any area of subjects taught at school there is an opportunity to be employed in that area.

6. Based off their subject choices from December of 2019, it's clear that a large number of students favored humanities over the other three options. I would say based off the December 2019 results it's not surprising that a large number of students picked humanities however I would say the jump in interests in the other subjects are extremely surprising in some cases. I find that the jump in interest in commerce subjects makes sense as its not that big of a jump but the jump in practical and Stem subjects are strange but not impossible. In 2019 6% of students favored Stem subjects were as 38% favored humanities. I find this strange as in 2020 when students choose their subjects 36% of students chose Stem subjects as their first choice and another 36% choose humanities as their first choice. I find it strange that 36% of students choose a Stem subject as their most wanted choice where as in 2019 only 6% indicated interest in this area.

Task 2: Questions

1. Based on all the resources on the PowerPoint I can see that there is a clear lack of humanities-based subjects as these sources favour commerce, stem, and practical based subjects and a large amount of money and effort to make the other three areas more favourable.

2. I believe the government would have always favored these subject categories as it tends to be more profitable than the humanities area. However, I believe due to the recession in 2008 the government pushed to favor the more profitable and employable categories even more as they needed this more than ever. I also believe that the new favoring encouraged the idea to create a new junior cert to encourage students to choose the subjects the government wanted them to choose. In summary I'd say these subject areas have been given extra attention as they create more money which is what was needed after the recession.

3. Since 2008 the majority of students have been choosing Commerce, Stem and practical subjects. This could be for a number of reasons including personal interest, better courses, more employable or more profitable. I'm not sure if the numbers were similar before the recession in 2008 but with the government clearly favoring these subjects, I'm sure there's an influence.

4. I'm not saying that with the government pushing these subjects in schools and giving them more attention and funds is convincing students to pick these subjects. A student's personal reasons still apply, and everyone has different views and motives. However, I'm sure the

government favoring these subjects and giving them more attention certainly attracts some students to these areas when choosing subjects for leaving cert and after leaving school.

5. I'm not sure as I'm sure students would have different views on the matter. For example, some students might see less students doing humanities and think "that's less competition for me" whereas others might be wary about it thinking "there's not much profit in that area or as much as other areas." I'd say some students might look into it and be aware of the government pushing the other three subject areas and choosing them consciously where as other students would just see the benefit and think "that's great" and end up choosing them unconsciously without being aware of why these courses seem so much better and have been given more attention in the first place. Basically, I believe every student would see this message differently (consciously or unconsciously) and different students would have different reactions to it.

6. I would say there is a connection related to the jump in numbers in Stem subjects. I believe students choose the subjects they had a personal interest in in the subjects it 2019 whereas when they were picking their subjects the results showed a favoring towards stem subjects. I believe students chose the humanities subjects that they wanted and also picked a stem subject as they thought these would supply more options in later years. I would believe that this is related to the government favoring these subjects. The same goes for commerce and practical subjects, I just used stem as an example as the jump in popularity was bigger.

7. I'm not sure if I could indicate how exactly the new junior cycle has shaped our views on learning in school. Since I didn't do the old junior cycle, I can't compare the differences. However, I do believe they have changed it for a number of reasons but in relation to this I would say it is clear that they have changed it to favor commerce, practical and stem subjects over humanities subjects.

<p style="text-align:center;color:red;">Research Project Answers 5: Damien</p>

Task 1: Questions

1. Students thought that the most important subject group in the Junior Cert was the humanities group, with a combination of all of the subject groups coming in second.

2. Students noticed that extra attention was being given to the STEM subjects, with the humanities subject groups, in second, getting more attention by teachers.

3. It was a mixture of both a combination of the subjects and STEM subjects that students found to be most employable

4. Students from the survey were found to have some interest in taking up the humanities subject group, with practical subjects in second place.

5. Students thought that a qualification in the STEM and practical subjects were most likely able to get a person a professional career after school.

6. Students ended up choosing mostly STEM, commerce and practical subjects for their Leaving Cert.

Task 2: Questions

1. STEM, Commerce and Practical subjects were the groups that the government has given more attention to since the 2008 recession,

2. The government has paid more attention to these subjects as they pose a higher chance of finding a government related job, such as a civil servant or a more menial job.

3. According to CAO figures, STEM, Commerce and Practical subjects were the majority of students began choosing instead of humanity subjects.

4. A student in the Junior Cycle or in TY might see the growing demand for a career in these three subjects, STEM, Commerce and Practical, they would be pressured into picking those subjects to concerns about their future and won't be able to seek out what they might enjoy.

5. This makes students believe that these subjects are more sought out for by the government rather than a humanity subject, that can provide them very little monetary benefits.

6. It seems that the influence that the government has in relation to students is quite high, as many students have chosen the three opposing subject groups to humanities due to government influence.

7. Personally, the new junior cycle has shaped students views towards learning to view it as a sort of process, in preparation towards sending out the student to be a mindless drone to serve only the state.

Appendix J:

This appendix presents copies of the project review document that was provided to the

assistant researchers upon completion of the empirical study. This appendix also includes the

completed version of these documents.

Study Review

1. **Which part of the study did you find most enjoyable?**

2. **Which part of the study did you find least enjoyable?**

3. **Do you think Mr. Wall attempted to include you in the project in a legitimate way?**

4. **If we were to complete another research study together, what advice would you give to Mr. Wall? And/or what would you do differently?**

5. **What is your opinion on students and teachers working together like this Vs. the traditional barriers which exist between them?**

6. **What do you think Mr. Wall wanted you to learn by participating as a researcher in this project?**

7. **What is the main thing (if anything) which you learned from participating in this project? (In general)**

8. **What is the main thing (if anything) which you learned about schooling from in this project? (Specifically)**

9. 'Human capital theory' is a way of saying that the Government treats schools like machines (factories) that manufacture products (students) which it can then sell to big businesses! This way, both the Government and the businesses win because they make lots of money. Who loses? Students who are denied a bias free approach to education which may have led to different life choices e.g. a person who has creative and loves art is pressured to apply their skills working in a company, rather than having the freedom to use their skills as they please.

   What do you think about human capital theory?

10. **Has participation in this project changed how you view schooling in any way?**

11. **Final Thoughts:**

Anonymous Review 1

1. I found writing in the journal most enjoyable as I liked documenting what I was seeing, and it also gave me a bigger perspective on things around me.

2. Reading over the survey results was probably the least interesting as you need to keep focus and track numbers, however I am well aware that the work had to be done.

3. I felt included throughout the entire project and I felt like for the majority of the project I had something of importance to do.

4. This comment has nothing to do with the work of my fellow researchers, but I feel like if I was Mr Wall and I was doing this project again, I think I would have chosen the researchers slightly differently. I think the best way to decide if someone is interested in the project would have been to have everyone, I was considering do the task that we did with the journals. That way I would get more info from more students and it would help me determine who was interested in the project. Again, this has nothing to do with the other guys I just think it would have been a better way of deciding.

5. I think it is great. If a teacher creates a bond with a student, they are more than likely to pay attention in class and to put more effort in for that teacher.

6. I think he wanted to learn our perspective on the research question. This allows him to get more input.

7. I'd say what I really learnt about was the statistics. I was already aware of the bias towards subjects, but I found it interesting to dig deeper into the subject. I also learned that I generally enjoy this type of work. I've always being aware of things around me so to get to do a whole project on it felt great.

8. I would say I was always aware that some subjects were more employable for future careers, but this project made me pay far more attention to the subject throughout the entire year.

9. I think the Human Capital Theory holds a large amount of truth. I still don't know what I want to do after school but I don't think I'll be unconsciously hypnotised to do what the government wants me to do, especially after doing this project. Everyone has a different perspective on things and some people just couldn't care to give their perspective but from what I learned from students and just talking to random people I'd say most of them weren't aware of the Human Capital Theory. I don't believe that it will affect all of these people, but I have no doubt it will affect some of them in some way.

10. I'd say so, however I also believe that just being in T.Y this year has just made me more aware of these sort of subjects as I'm not just focusing on school work, and I believe being a part of this project assisted in that greatly.

11. Honestly, it was just an all-round great experience. I learned a lot from this project and I generally enjoyed learning about these topics. If an opportunity for a project like this came up in future I would most likely take it and I would love the opportunity to work with Mr. Wall again in 5th or 6th year.

1. I found gathering the data quite enjoyable, it helps to see other people's viewpoint surrounding a certain topic

2. To be completely honest I enjoyed everything about this project, I know that's a bit of a cop out answer but this has truly been a gold experience

3. Of course, he always asked for our opinions and always asked for feedback on how he could make things easier to understand, I really felt like I was an important ally to the team

4. I would say to try to think of some of the questions from a student's point of view (e.g. is this question easy to understand?)

5. I much prefer this method; I felt a bit more at ease and I felt like I retained knowledge far better than the traditional method, also made the teacher feel a little bit more down to earth and didn't seem like they were just reading from a PowerPoint

6. I feel Mr. Wall wanted us to learn to question if we truly have choice over our actions or is this just a set path made by the government

7. I've learnt that sticking to a roadmap for when we should get work done is a lot harder than we thought (I know random just couldn't think of anything to put down)

8. I learnt that schools/ the government might have a certain agenda for what they want students to pick as their subjects

9. I feel like this theory couldn't be any closer to the truth. It's something I have thought about before in the past, but I initially didn't think too much about the topic, but now I truly think this theory is being put in place all around the world today

10. Yes, it has, I now see school for what it is, refer to above for thoughts

11. I don't really have any further thoughts, all that I wanted to say has been said already, except for thank you for giving me the pleasure of working with you on this research project!

Anonymous Review 3

1. The time we supervised the other TY students when they did the surveys.

2. To be honest I found nothing my least favourite I enjoyed doing it all and helping Mr. Wall.

3. Yes. I do believe this because Mr. Wall has good sight and knew I would get the job done.

4. I would tell him to have probably chose [redacted] instead of [redacted], am only joking, if he had only picked 3 of us instead of picking his favourites, I would have told him to change that.

5. I think it is 10 times better than the traditional barrier because the traditional barrier I am not a fan of.

6. I believe he wanted me to learn the basics on Philosophy and to have a better understanding and view on things.

7. I learned how much it does look like the government can be behind anything suspicious.

8. I learned how much schooling means more to others than it ever has to me.

9. I believe this theory could be true I mean look at the world what is nearly everyone in the world interested in 'money' and the government is the centre point for this.

10. It has shown me that some areas of schooling are actually not that bad, and pretty fun to do.

11. I just hope me, and my buddies get Mr. Wall for a teacher next year because doing this with him was great fun.

Anonymous Review 4

1. When we were discussing the answers to all the student's survey responses because it was a relaxing and informative experience.

2. When we had our meal after the trade fair, it was nothing there that happened it was just that I was feeling quite sick at that point, so I was just not in a good mode to begin with.

3. Yes, I definitely think he included me in the project.

4. There is honestly nothing I can think of that I would change.

5. I feel like this way has more communication and the teacher doesn't just treat the students like students but they treat them like people going out of your way for your help I felt you did genuinely cared about what we were doing and greatly appreciate it.

6. I think he wanted us to look at school and other things in not just one way and to look at things with a different perspective.

7. I learned that the school system we have just come to accept isn't so perfect after all.

8. Schooling is in general to make students good money makers for them.

9. I think that the victims are not only the students but also the teachers who must teach these ideas even if they don't agree with them so they can make a living.

10. Yes, it definitely has.

11. This was an amazing project to work on and I'm so glad that I got to be a part of it.

<u>Anonymous Review 5</u>

1. The part of the study I found most enjoyable was gathering the information we needed to complete the study.

2. There wasn't any part of the study that I did not find enjoyable, it was all a good time spent with Mr wall and the other study group members.

3. He very much did so, I have no doubts.

4. I would advise him to pick a smaller group so there is less waiting on others participating in the study. I would have given more input into the study as I felt as if I wasn't putting in as nearly enough towards the study than others.

5. I feel there's a general higher quality of work from the combination of students and teachers, and it's also quite refreshing to see that the teachers are mostly like students.

6. I think that Mr. Wall wanted us to learn to be more self-aware about everything, notice the fine details of seemingly innocent ideas and what not.

7. I have learned more in depth detail about the review process for junior cert and how students pick subjects.

8. That schools pay more attention to subjects that would be able to allow them to obtain profits from.

9. I think it's a vile thing for any government to pressure their youth into picking more profitable jobs for the government and business, they show no interest in the individuals talent in other paths and only focus on servants towards the government.

10. It has changed my view towards schooling in a negative light, as im now aware of what the government may be doing, as it has verified by a group of professionals so it is more just a theory.

11. I have found this study to be the better things to come out of my year in transition year, it has been a wonderful time with the other members of the group and I wish Mr. Wall the best of luck in his field.