

Athlone Institute of Technology

Partnership between teacher and parent in national school in junior classes.

Michelle O'Malley

A00248256

'Submitted in part fulfilment of the Master of Arts in Child and Youth Studies, Athlone
Institute of Technology

Submission Date: 25th May 2018

Word Count: 14486

Subject: Dissertation

Supervisor: Dr Mairead Seery

Declaration of Non-Plagiarism

I hereby declare that this research project is presented in part fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Child and Youth Studies in Athlone Institute of Technology. The information contained in this research project is entirely the work of the author. All information other than my own contribution will be fully referenced within the text, and listed in the reference section at the back of this research project. This includes Internet sources.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Acknowledgements

- I would firstly, like to thank my supervisor Dr Mairead Seery for all her time, guidance and support throughout this research project.
- To the respondents who completed the interviews, thank you for your time and cooperation.
- To my parents, Michael and Eileen for their support throughout this year. I really could not have completed it without ye both.
- To my sisters Sinead and Aishling, brother in laws David and Keith for all your words of wisdom laughs and excellent child minding skills. Ellie my amazing niece always there with a smile and hug when needed.
- To my partner Declan for your love support and patience's during this process and the unshakeable faith you have in me to be able to achieve whatever I set my mind to.
- Last but not least my amazing son Ryan you have been my inspiration to complete this masters. The long nights and hard work was made easier by your hugs kisses and smiles. I love you the most in the whole wide world.

Table of Contents

Declaration of Non-Plagiarism	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	3
Section 1: Literature Review.....	5
Introduction	5
The role of the state in education.....	7
The role of the teacher and parent in partnership	8
Parental involvement in education	10
Benefits of partnership for children	11
Benefits of parental partnership for teachers and parents.....	12
Barriers to partnership with teachers	13
Conclusion	14
Section 2: Methodology.....	16
Introduction	16
Research design	16
Participants	18
Materials.....	19
Procedure.....	19
Ethical considerations.....	20
Limitations	20
Summary.....	21
Section 3: Results	22
Introduction	22
Method of analysis.....	22
Working in collaboration	22
Attitudes towards parental partnership.....	23
Experience of partnership.....	23
Policies related to partnership	24
How teachers and parents encourage partnership	25
Perception of partnership.....	27
Communication	27
Partnership when starting school.....	28
Looking to the future at how partnership can be improved.....	29
Teacher-parent relationship.....	29

Overall Summary of Results	30
Section 4: Discussion	32
Introduction	32
Summary of Findings.....	32
Partnership requires collaboration	33
Concept of partnership	34
Experience of partnership.....	35
Attitudes towards parental partnership.....	37
Communication	37
Barriers to partnership	38
Benefits of partnership.....	39
Importance of partnership.....	39
Teacher parent relationship	40
Evaluation of method and suggestions for future research	40
Section 5: Conclusion.....	42
Section 6: Recommendations	44
References	45
Appendices.....	51
Appendix 1 : Questions for Parents	52
Appendix 2 : Questions for Teachers.....	54
Appendix 3: Consent form	56
Appendix 4: Information sheet	58
Appendix 5: Letter to principal.....	60

Abstract

This study examined the views of teachers and parents on what was their opinion on partnership, in national school with junior classes. For the purpose of this research study junior classed are junior and senior infancy in nation school in Ireland. The aim of this research project was to explore teachers' and parents' views, perspectives and beliefs regarding partnership in junior classes in national school. The objectives were to investigate what was teacher and parent understandings of partnership within the school setting, what kind of partnership exists between teacher and parent and do teachers and parents feel there is any way which partnership can be improved.

It was observed that there was a limited amount of research evidence carried out in the past on partnership with teachers and parents in national school. Using this thesis as a tool for creating this awareness, will allow for further research to be carried out.

A qualitative method in the form of interviews was used. This method of data gathered a large amount of in- depth information applicable to the research topic. Eight respondents in total were interviewed, four teachers and four parents. All respondents involved in the research study were either teachers or parents of children in national school in junior classes.

The main findings highlighted what teachers' and parents' views on their understanding of the term 'partnership'. The results showed there were differences in opinions amongst teachers and parents view of partnership. The teachers felt partnership meant parents becoming more involved with school life. Parents felt partnership was ensuring the child's homework was done and anything they needed was supplied. Both parties felt that to develop partnership then communication is a key competency skill.

All respondents voiced that there are many benefits linked with positive partnership and how it is implemented. However there are barriers to partnership involved in

terms of finding the correct way in which partnership should be approached. In addition, the fact that parents were not aware of any formal policy on how to communicate with the school undermined the process of partnership.

These findings imply that more research needs to be carried out in the future with regards to how best to encourage partnership with teachers and parents. It suggests that there need to be more research and implementation of policies regarding partnership with teachers and parents. Taking a collaborative approach, having a continuous open line of communication with teachers and parents was considered as being very important.

Section 1: Literature Review

Introduction

This section provides a review of the literature in relation to the partnership between teachers and parents of junior classes in Irish national schools.

The primary branch of the National Parents' Council (NPC) supports partnership, stating that 'partnership between home and school is important because with positive and active partnership the child gets the best that primary education can offer' (NPC, 2004, p.4). There are many benefits that can be gained by working in partnership. Research has shown that children do better and are happier at school where parents and teachers work closely together. Teachers can improve the child's school experience when being supported by parents. Parents play an active part in planning for the best possible education for children in their school, although they may not always be aware of this (NPC, 2004).

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) clearly believe schools should ensure that parents have the chance to become familiar with how and what their children are doing and learning in the class room. Parents need to know that they are participating in their child's education. The INTO expressed that teacher-parent partnership is welcomed and, indeed, needed, as it can have a substantial influence on their children's welfare (INTO, 1994, p.99).

Teachers share the care of their students with the parents. When children are in school, they are in the care of their teacher. The teacher-parent partnership is seen as a key aspect for children to adapt to the school setting. Teachers and parents learn from each other through good communication, which in turn will build trust between the teacher and parent. The foundation for working in partnership is achieving equality of educational outcomes for all children, regardless of their social or economical background. Hanafin in 2006 argued that there are benefits to working in partnership by developing strong links between the home and the community, including schools. These links would encourage the relationship with teachers and, in the future, benefit the child. In 2000, the National Children's Strategy listed partnership as one of the working values through which the strategy would be rolled out, stating that: measures should be taken in partnership within and between relevant players, be it the State or the voluntary/community sector, and families;

services for children should be delivered in a co-ordinated, coherent and effective manner through integrated needs analysis, policy planning and service delivery (DH&C, 2000, p.10).

The foundation for working in partnership is achieving equality of educational outcomes for all children, regardless of their social or economical background. Hanafin in 2006 argued that there are benefits to working in partnership by developing strong links between the home and the community, including schools. These links would encourage the relationship with teachers and, in the future, benefit the child. In 2000, the National Children's Strategy listed partnership as one of the working values through which the strategy would be rolled out, stating that: measures should be taken in partnership within and between relevant players, be it the State or the voluntary/community sector, and families; services for children should be delivered in a co-ordinated, coherent and effective manner through integrated needs analysis, policy planning and service delivery (DH&C, 2000, p.10).

The primary branch of the National Parents' Council (NPC) supports partnership, stating that 'partnership between home and school is important because with positive and active partnership the child gets the best that primary education can offer' (NPC, 2004, p.4). There are many benefits that can be gained by working in partnership. Research has shown that children do better and are happier at school where parents and teachers work closely together. Teachers can improve the child's school experience when being supported by parents. Parents play an active part in planning for the best possible education for children in their school, although they may not always be aware of this (NPC, 2004).

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) clearly believe schools should ensure that parents have the chance to become familiar with how and what their children are doing and learning in the class room. Parents need to know that they are participating in their child's education. The INTO expressed that teacher-parent partnership is welcomed and, indeed, needed, as it can have a substantial influence on their children's welfare (INTO, 1994, p.99).

The role of the state in education

The idea of partnership between parents and teachers is a new one in Ireland. A growing body of literature highlights the importance of parental involvement in a child's education. The family is the most powerful establishment in rearing and educating a child, and influencing their development (Irish Constitution, 1938; Giddens, 2009). The crucial role parents play in the lives of their children is underpinned by the Irish Constitution. Article 42 states:

“The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children” (Irish Constitution, 2013, p.166-168).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12 states that:

“Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”

(United Nations, 1989: Article 12). The National Children's Office (NCO) was established in 2001 under the auspices of the Department of Health and Children (DH&C). The Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) was established in 2005. It is managed by the DH&C and incorporates aspects of the DES, Department of Social and Family Affairs (DS&FA) and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR). Following the establishment of the OMCYA, the administration of the NCO, and therefore responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the National Children's Strategy (DH&C, 2000), was assigned to that office. All of those promote the concept of teachers and parents working together in partnership.

A child's education commences prior to formal teaching – parents are recognised as the primary educators. Bronfenbrenner (1995) acknowledged that within the microsystem, the family has the maximum influence on the child's development, followed by the child's school and friends (cited in Doherty and Hughes, 2009). When debating parental involvement, Epstein (2001) states:

Partnership for parents in education is part of Irish Government policy. Through the Programme for Economic and Social Progress the Government and the social

partners have officially recognised the promotion of parental involvement in the education of their children as a vital strategy of educational policy and practice.

The Department of Education and Skills values the view of the National Parents' Council, expressed in its recently published booklet, "Parents' Associations – Making Them Work" (2010), that parents should be involved in their local school for two main reasons. The school is viewed as an extension of the home and an active partnership between parents and teachers can make this a reality, especially in the eyes of the young child, who is the central figure (NCP, 2010). The Department of Education and Skills identifies that school/family relationships are vital for primary schools. As the recognised primary educators of the child, parents have a right to be fully involved in their child's education. With this right comes the responsibility to be active in their child's education in the school setting. To build a positive partnership, parents should be given as much information as possible on all aspects of the child's progress and development. Galvin, Higgins and Mahony (2009) carried out a four year study looking at how partnership worked in schools and to highlight the benefit to children. Parents, as a body, are also entitled to know whether the school and the education system are meeting children's needs (Department of Education, 1991; Galvin, Higgins, Mahony, 2009).

The role of the teacher and parent in partnership

Significant philosophers in the history of education have recognised the important role of parents in children's learning. For example, Comenius, who influenced the construction of the general theory of education, spoke about the 'school of the mother's lap'. Pestalozzi believed that for children the teaching of their parents will always be core and that the teacher's role is to provide a setting in which the child will have a positive experience of education (cited in Mhic Mhathúna and Taylor, 2012). Montessori, Froebel and McMillan all believed that the mother was the primary care giver for the child before they go to school. Vygotsky, in his development of the socio-cultural theory, was the first to recognise the role of more familiar others, including the parents, and how they support their child's learning and development. This can be seen when a child is learning language in their contact with other people, as the learning of language is rooted in its social context (Mhic Mhathúna and Taylor, 2012).

Another theoretical perspective, which has had a substantial influence on this research, is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that the ecological environment comprises layers, with each layer of the child's environment significantly influencing the child's development, either in a negative or positive way. Bronfenbrenner believed that a child's development is best understood within the environment in which it occurs (Doherty and Hughes, 2009; Mhic Mhathúna & Taylor, 2012, p.266). Bronfenbrenner (1979) presented a set of environmental constructs comprising five concentric circles, which is used to outline how children's development is greatly affected by events which are not directly associated to the child. At the heart of this system is the 'microsystem', which is the developing child and the people who are significant in their life, such as family and teachers. This points to the need for teachers and parents to work in collaboration with each other. The second level is the 'mesosystem', which is categorised as the connections between the microsystems, such as the child's parents and the school. The third level is the 'exosystem', which consists of the settings that affect the child, even though the child is not directly involved within the setting, such as a parent's place of employment. The fourth level is the 'macrosystem', which refers to the cultural or social context in which the child lives and includes the laws and customs of society. The final level is the 'chronosystem', which refers to environmental events such as earthquakes and changes during the life course, such as divorce. While the home and school are independent in the microsystems, the collaboration between these microsystems can be immensely influential, and for this reason, Bronfenbrenner believes that the teacher-parent partnership is vital to a good education experience (Seginer, 2006). *"When parents, teachers, students and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work"* (cited in Wyatt-Smith, Ellins and Gunn, 2011, p.156). There has been extensive research carried out to try and define what parental involvement in a child's education is (Harris and Goodall, 2007). The term parental involvement is not consistent. There are several expressions being used to describe parental involvement in a child's education. Some of these are 'parental engagement', 'family-school partnership' and 'parental participation', meaning the definition can vary quite considerably (OECD, n.d). As there isn't a definite term for parental involvement, a frequent definition used by researchers is "...parental

participation in the educational process and experiences of their children” (Jeynes, 2005, p.245).

Teachers of junior classes in primary school play a crucial role in the lives of children. Research shows that quality early year experience in education has a significant influence on child development and future academic success (Essa, 2014; Reardon, 2009; Baldock, 2001). In 2017, Barnardos updated their handbook “Preparing Children for ‘Big School’ – Top Tips for Parents”. This highlighted what teachers thought parents should know about having children ready for school. Teachers are involved in the education of parents about the importance of partnership. This shows teachers want to actively work with parent in the education of children. Drawing upon Epstein’s typology of parental involvement, Barnardos (2017) provide advice which parents can implement to encourage parental involvement in six areas, as outlined by Epstein. This document encourages parents to develop skills in their children which teachers feel are important (Barnardos, 2017). Kay (2004), highlighted there are many reasons for teachers to work in partnership with parents. Parents have a unique set of skills and information which can benefit the teacher, school, parent and the child. These areas are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2001).

Parental involvement in education

Researchers now recognise that parental involvement is multidimensional and comprises an assortment of parental activities (Epstein, 1992; Lareau, 1989; Muller, 1995; 1998 cited in Harris and Goodall, 2007). From investigating the research literature, a key framework for defining the types of parental involvement continues to re-emerge within the research and policy development. Epstein (2002) identifies a typology, which comprises three overlapping domains including school, family, and community partnerships – these influences will shape how a child progresses in education (cited in Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, and De Pedro, 2011). The typology describes six categories of parental involvement in education, which are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Hornby and Lafaele (2011) developed a model of looking at parental involvement and concluded that there are a wide range of barriers to partnership with teachers and parents. Taking the above

into account, the over-all agreement is to advocate that the term 'parental involvement' represents a number of different parental actions and parenting practices (Harris and Goodall, 2007). Aistear is the early childhood curriculum framework for children from birth to six years, launched by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in 2009 (NCCA, 2009, p.7). It supports parents, teachers, and practitioners in planning for and providing pleasant, motivating and developmentally suitable learning experiences (NCCA, 2009). Aistear is supported by twelve key principles of early learning and development, and is presented in four overarching and interrelated themes (NCCA, 2009). One key principle relates to parents, family and community. Aistear recognises the important and influential role of parents and places great importance on building partnership between teachers and parents. "Parents are the most important people in their children's early lives. By working together, parents and practitioners can enhance children's learning and development" (NCCA, 2009, p.7).

Aistear provides guidance to teachers and parents on how they can work in partnership by providing practical suggestions which can be implemented in practice. Teachers are encouraged to share information regarding the child's learning, to share resources, and to allow parents to become involved in their child's education (NCCA, 2009).

According to Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009), partnership between parents and teachers should be built alongside the curriculum for junior and senior infants in national school, and it defines partnership thus: "[it] involves parents, families and practitioners working together to benefit children. Each recognises, respects and values what the other do and say. Partnership involves responsibility on both sides". (NCCA, 2009).

Benefits of partnership for children

Widespread research has shown that parental involvement with teachers and schools has an enormous effect on a child's overall educational achievement at all stages (Jeynes, 2012; Gilleece, 2015). Research has also highlighted parental involvement to be enormously influential especially in the early years of formal education. Mishra (2012) expresses the importance of parental involvement and partnership in the early years of education, describing it as 'essential', as it encourages positive self-esteem and improves social relationships. A number of

international studies looking at children from early childhood to adolescence have shown the importance of parental involvement to encourage school attendance, increased school readiness, and early literacy skills (Senechal and LeFevre, 2002; Sheppard, 2009; Lau, Li and Rao, 2011). In addition, the NICHD longitudinal Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development found higher parental involvement had a positive influence in reducing problem behaviour and increasing social functioning (Nokali, Bachman and Votruba-Dizal, 2010).

Benefits of parental partnership for teachers and parents

In addition to being enormously valuable for the child, partnership between the two parties has also been shown to have a variety of benefits for both parents and teachers. Parents who are involved in their child's education frequently experience improved self-confidence and develop positive attitudes in relation to education, which may influence them towards advancing their own education (Haynes and Ben-Avie, 1996; Otter, 2014). In addition, studies clearly demonstrate that parents attitudes and behaviour are positively influenced as a result of parental partnership. Because of parents taking an active role in the school, teachers experience better-quality parent-teacher relationships and increased morale (Epstein, 2001; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011).

Haynes and Ben-Avie (1996) state that, when parents work in partnership with the school, it increases the knowledge base of the teachers of the socio-cultural context of the families in the school. This informs practice and in turn allows teachers to adjust their teaching style to better aid the child's learning in a more effective way. Wescott Dodd and Konzal (2002) suggest that the more teachers know about the child and their family, the more successfully they will be in teaching them in the class room.

Regardless of the acknowledgement of the beneficial consequences resulting from parental involvement, some researchers have exposed possible disadvantages due to noticeable changes in children's behaviour, reduced social interactions and the expression of more negative emotions when parents are present in the class room (Smith and Howes, 1994, cited in Mc Dermott, 2010).

Barriers to partnership with teachers

Parental involvement in education is a term which is used to describe anything from helping the school over fundraising to accompanying children on school outings (O'Brien, 2007). Evidence highlights that the enormous influence of developing an effective educational partnership between teacher and parent is not straightforward, and not easy to achieve. 'Partnerships of any kind are complex' (Pugh and De' Ath, 1989, p. 67). Some barriers to partnership between teacher and parent can be caused by problems outside the educational system. The barriers can include financial, family and health issues, social or community, cultural and geographic situations, or a combination of all those (Galvin, Higgins and Mahony, 2009). The challenge for the teachers and school system is to work, in partnership with parents and the wider community, to overcome as many of these barriers as possible. This must be done in a way which is child-centred, regular and effective in terms of educational outcomes (DES, 2005).

When parents are involved in education, that involvement may cause challenges – these can be caused by poor communication, cultural differences, lack of time and some parents trying to have greater control than is required (Palaiologou, 2013). However the benefits to partnership have been shown to out weight the negatives. Children who parents are involved in their education are likely to better academically (Jeynes, 2012; Gilleece, 2015). When an issue arises, parents may offer a different understanding of the child's needs; this will allow the parent and teacher to collaborate in the child's best interest, which in turn will result in development of trust between the parent and teacher.

It is extensively recognised that parental involvement has many advantages for children (Wilder, 2014). Nevertheless, there are several possible barriers which have been shown to obstruct parental involvement (Nalls, Mullis, Cornille, Mullis, and Jeter, 2010). One of these could be the educational level of the parent. The level of parental education will impact on how aware they are of the importance of partnership. When looking at Epstein's (2001) typology of parental involvement, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) outlined a model of influences which act as barriers to that involvement. These are individual parent and family factors, parent-teacher factors, societal factors and child factors. Possible barriers comprise family commitments, parental education, teacher confidence, age of the child, the child's

school performance, and the opposing attitudes, opinions and understanding of parents and teachers concerning parental involvement (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Epstein (1995) highlights several administrative factors such as characteristics, aims and objectives. These have the ability to inspire or obstruct parental involvement in practice (cited in Mc Dermott, 2010; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011).

Harris and Goodall (2007) found that work obligations are frequently quoted as barriers to parental involvement. However, this is not the consensus among researchers. A recent study carried out in the Philippines concluded that the most quoted barrier to parental involvement is the parents' negative perception of school involvement (Sapungan and Sapungan, 2014).

Additionally, another barrier to parental involvement which commonly appears in the literature is the socio-economic status of the parents. The lower the socio-economic status, the less likely parents are to become involved in their child's education. Parents in that situation often put less value on education (Galvin, Higgins and Mahony, 2009). When a family has a higher socio-economic status, parents tend to put a higher level of importance on education and parental involvement. Where a higher level of parental involvement was identified in families, they usually had access to more resources (Galvin, Higgins and Mahony, 2009; Harris and Goodall, 2007; Walker and Berthelsen 2010; Otter 2014).

Conclusion

Development of partnership between teachers and parents is complex and makes particular demands of both parties. The power to develop positive partnerships rests with both the school and the family.

Partnership between parents and teachers is widely recognised as multidimensional, representing a range of parental behaviours and parenting practices (Harris and Goodall, 2007). By discussing the theoretical perspectives of parent-teacher partnership, this literature review outlined the important role parents play in educating and shaping the development of a child. The benefits of parental involvement were explored, showing that it has a profound influence on a child's overall academic achievement. The barriers which impede parental involvement were also explored.

Ultimately, the greater the communication, collaboration and relationship is between all teachers and parents, the bigger the potential to contribute to the development of more effective partnerships in the school setting, to help children grow and learn in a safe and comfortable environment.

From the literature which has been reviewed there are gaps in the research which this study aims to address. In the literature there is little reference to the experiences of the teacher or parent in relation to partnership. The literature has highlighted some barriers to partnership but these should be re-examined as a number of studies are over 10 years old. As the researcher feels that the society we live in and the demands on our time and resources have changed. The Aistear framework encourages partnership between teachers and parents. The researcher aims to explore if partnership exist between teachers and parents and how it is implemented.

The research question arising from this literature review is: What is partnership with parents? The objectives of this study are:

- To explore the experiences of parents and teachers in relation to partnership.
- To investigate the barriers which obstruct parental involvement in school and how these can be overcome.
- To examine how teachers can aid better partnership with parents in the junior classes through the Aistear frameworks.

Section 2: Methodology

Introduction

The aim of this research project is to explore teacher and parent s, perspectives and beliefs regarding partnership in junior classes in national school. The objectives are to investigate what teacher and parent understandings of partnership within the school setting are, what kind of partnership there is between teachers and parents, and whether teachers and parents feel there is any way in which said partnership can be improved. This will be investigated by using direct and indirect questions.

This chapter outlines the method that was most suitable for gathering the information required to achieve the objectives. It describes measures used to gather data as well as providing an account of the participants, the ethical considerations involved, limitations and the planned method used to analyse the data.

Research design

As this study focused on how teachers and parents work together in partnership in national school junior classes, interviews of a semi-structured nature were chosen, as they incorporate structure, allowing for cross-case comparability (Bryman, 2008; Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Semi-structured interviews also enable the researcher to clarify, probe and further investigate the responses, ideas and feelings of participants (Bell and Waters, 2014).

Qualitative research was selected as it allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of individuals' perspectives, which is vital to this study. This research study was conducted within a qualitative framework also known as exploratory research. Qualitative research is a method of inquiry used frequently in the social sciences (Bell and Waters, 2014; Bryman, 2012). According to Wyse (2011), qualitative research is used to gain an understanding of primary reasons, opinions, and motivations. Examples of qualitative research include interviews and focus groups. Sufficient amounts of information can be gained that way; however, these methods can be time consuming and participants may feel intimidated with one on one interaction (Bell and Waters, 2014; Bryman, 2008).

For the purpose of this research project, the researcher chose interviews as the methodological approach to collect information from a number of participants.

Interviews are one of the most commonly used data collection methods within interpretivism studies (Bryman, 2008; Crotty, 1998). The main reason for the use of this method is that qualitative research interviews seek to describe the meanings of central themes in relation to the topic being researched. The key task in interviewing is to understand the essence of what the interviewee is saying (Kvale, 1996). The quality of research greatly depends on the individual skills of the researcher and is easily influenced by the researcher's personal prejudices and characteristics (Anderson, 2010; Hoffman, 2007). There are a number of advantages and disadvantages to using the interview method. One main advantage of interviews is that participants are asked the same questions in the same sequence. The participants are anonymous and the information is collected confidentially. The disadvantage of interviewing is that the size of the sample is limited to the number of interviewing participants. Interviews are time consuming and run the risk of the participants feeling intimidated (Bryman, 2016; Hoffmann, 2007).

In relation to this study, four teachers and four parents were interviewed; meaning that the sample size for the study on parent-teacher partnerships in national school junior classes was small. In an effort to resolve this issue, the researcher decided to use both closed and open-ended questions, in order to allow participants to express opinions and deliver more information during the interviewing process. The gathered research, in combination with sources already in place, helped the researcher to form an opinion on the topic. For this study, the researcher needed to use qualitative research because this topic is so far relatively little investigated in Ireland.

A number of steps were put in place by the researcher to ensure reliability and validity of this study. To this end, the researcher devised their own original interview questions. Following this, a pilot interview was conducted and all necessary changes were made to the questions. Finally, the researcher conducted each interview and analysed the data without the involvement of others.

The list of questions that was developed for the interview was shaped by the literature review and grounded in the gaps identified in the research (see appendix 1 and 2). Questions 1-8 were designed to gather information on what the teacher and parent understanding of partnership within the school setting is. Questions 9-14 were developed to identify what kind of partnership between teachers and parents exists.

Questions 15-19 were formed to explore ways in which that partnership could be improved.

Participants

For all qualitative research it is important to consider carefully how to choose research participants (Bryam, 2016; Saunders, 2012).

The process for recruiting participants for this study involved the use of purposive sampling, which is frequently used in qualitative research. This form of sampling was chosen because it involves the researcher purposely selecting participants who, in their opinion, are relevant to the study, based on their knowledge or expertise (Sarantakos, 1998). To meet the inclusion criteria for this study, participants were required to be a teacher or parent of children in junior classes in national schools.

The interviews were carried out with four teachers who teach junior classes in national school and four parents who have children in junior classes in national school. For the purpose of this study, “junior class” means junior and senior infants. The researcher chose the individuals on the understanding that these teachers and parents would fulfil the objectives of the research project. The teachers and parents would have an in-depth knowledge of the topic based on their experience within the national school system. For confidentiality reasons, the participating teachers will be referred to as T1, T2, T3 and T4. The parents will be referred to as P1, P2, P3 and P4.

All the participants were female.

T1 is a teacher with four classes in her room; she is also the principal of the school. T2 has over eight years teaching experience in junior classes; she has just junior and senior infants in her room. T3 has only junior infants in her room and this was her first year teaching. T4 has three classes in her room and has been teaching junior infants for 15 years.

P1 is a mother of three children. She has one child in 3rd class, one child in senior infants, and one child in pre-school. P2 is a mother of one – her child is in junior infants. P3 is a mother of two, both children are in junior infants. P4 is a mother of five children; one in secondary school, one in 6th class, one in 4th class, one in 1st class, and the youngest in senior infants.

Materials

Each participant was given an information sheet and a consent form prior to the recording taking place. They had time to read these documents and ask any question they had. A Dictaphone was used when carrying out the interviews with the participants. All participants agreed to the use of a Dictaphone, as outlined in the information sheet and the signed consent form (see appendix 3 and 4). In addition to the recorded interviews, by paying full attention to the participants, observations were made and notes were taken to support the information recorded.

Procedure

The researcher initially looked at the schools in the area and contacted the respective principals to ask their permission to approach the teachers of the junior classes in their schools. The principals agreed to allow the researcher access to the teachers, and signed a letter of consent. A copy of this letter can be seen in the (see appendix 5). The researcher then approached parents whose children attended different schools to partake in the research. An information sheet and a letter of consent were given to both teachers and parents who were willing to take part in the interviewing process. The researcher gave her name and contact details in the event the participants had any questions. The researcher also assured the participants of confidentiality and explained that the teachers and parents interviewed would not be from the same school. The four teachers and four parents agreed to take part in the study. All participants were offered the choice of carrying out the interview at a time that best suited them.

The interviews were conducted with the teachers and parents during March and April 2018. The teacher interviews took place in their respective schools outside of class time. The interviews with the parents took place in a meeting room of a local hotel. Before each interview, a short time was allocated to allow the participant to read each question to ensure they understood what they were being asked. The researcher informed the participants that at any stage during the interview they could ask for the interview to be terminated or decline to answer a question. Each participant was informed they could receive a copy of the transcript when the interviews had been transcribed. All of the teachers and parents declined this offer.

The initial transcriptions included all spoken words and unspoken utterances. The researcher then identified the data which became the main focus of this research study through the method of selecting, focusing, and simplifying the data. The researcher applied a thematic analysis, which is a commonly used approach to analysing qualitative data (Bryman, 2016). The researcher began by listening to each interview a number of times and then transcribed them word for word. Notes were also written up after each interview. The transcripts were then read and re-read line by line, and relevant themes were recorded as they appeared in the data, by using different coloured highlighters. Following this, the themes were reviewed and categorized. This process allowed the researcher to make comparisons and detect contrasts within the participants' perceptions and experiences of parental partnership, which will be presented in a later section.

Ethical considerations

It is the duty of the researcher to anticipate any ethical issues that may arise when conducting a research project (Bell and Waters, 2014). This research study complies with the guidelines set out by the Athlone Institute of Technology. The guidelines state that the researcher should maintain the welfare of the participants and recognise any concerns which may arise. The anonymity of the participants was respected and their personal information was kept confidential. In certain cases, as is the situation in the study, access to one part of the research setting is gained through a 'gatekeeper'. In this study, the principals of the respective schools were the 'gatekeeper'.

When carrying out research, it is important to gain the trust of the participants and to guarantee confidentiality. It was very important that the teachers and parents understood that any personal information they shared would not be passed on. Each recorded interview would be kept in confidence until transcribed and then be destroyed. The transcript will be kept in a secure location and destroyed on the specific date outlined in the information sheet.

Limitations

Qualitative research has limitations which can appear in the research study. As interviews were the main method of gathering information in this project, the participants decided what information to share. A limitation of this study, which

should be acknowledged, is that it is a small-scale study. Another limitation is representativeness. As mentioned, due to the small scale of this study, not all teachers and parents had the opportunity to partake in the research, and therefore this study was not truly representative of the whole community of participants.

Summary

This section outlined in detail the method used to conduct the research study. The researcher decided to use a qualitative method, interviewing teachers and parents who are involved with junior classes in national schools. This section outlined the research design and the materials used to collect the information, and it gave a clear account of the procedure that occurred. The findings from the research and themes that arose are presented in the next section.

Section 3: Results

Introduction

This section describes the findings obtained from the interviews with both the teachers and the parents on parent/teacher partnership in junior classes in national school.

Method of analysis

To investigate the findings, a thematic approach was used, identifying the recurring themes which emerged from the interviews. Braun & Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis minimally establishes and describes the data set in in-depth detail. When using thematic analysis, it permits the researcher to increase their understanding about individuals and their situation at that time in their life. It also frequently goes further and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). A number of themes emerged once the data was reviewed numerous times. While presenting the data, the participants will remain anonymous and referred to as T1, T2, T3, T4, P1, P2, P3 and P4 as explained in the previous chapter.

The themes that were uncovered, reflecting the content obtained during the interviews with the teachers and parents, are as follows:

- Working in collaboration
- Perception of partnership
- Looking to the future at how partnership can be improved

Each theme has a number of subheadings, which will be discussed.

Working in collaboration

This theme will address the ways in which teachers and parents work in a collaborative way to achieve partnership. The teachers and parents were in agreement that there are many benefits to be had of working in collaboration to achieve a positive partnership; however, they also expressed that there can be some barriers to partnership. This section will examine the different experiences teachers

and parents have had when trying to work in partnership with each other within the school setting.

Attitudes towards parental partnership

During the course of the interview there were different attitudes towards the partnership with parents. Whilst most of these were positive and the teachers place a high value on the partnership. The teachers felt that parents had a lot to offer them and the school. One teacher expressed the view *“Parents have so many valuable skill and information to bring to the school”*. The teachers also highlighted the fact the parents were the primary educators of their children and if there is a good partnership then children will benefit. One teacher T1 said *“when parents understand what I am doing and why they will try encourage this at home”*. This attitude was the same with teacher 2 and 4. Only one teacher had a negative comment towards parents being involved. She felt it was up to her to deal with what went on in school and for the parents to take care of home. *“Some parents like to come in and take over”* It is important to note she felt there was a place for parental partnership and added *“parents have a role to play in school life”*.

The parents all had a positive attitude towards partnership. All parents seen the benefit of partnerships and they acknowledged they had an important role to play in their child's school life. P3 *“If I know what is going on in school I can carry on the learning at home”*. The other three parents expressed similar views. This finding shows that both teachers and parents see the importance of partnership and the benefits of partnership.

Experience of partnership

When teachers spoke of their experience of being collaborators within partnership, they pointed out it can lead to more work. T1 expressed that, *“I need to be very prepared if parents want a chat at the gate, it takes up pre time”*. T2 said: *“So parental partnerships to me is trying to interact and get to know the new parents and to find out what parents expect from me and the school.”* T4 had a slightly different view and saw it more as making sure that the child and parent are settling into school life. She makes an effort to help new parents settling into the school, as well. T4 states: *“At the start of the year for new parents, I ask them to come in for a quick informal meeting and just explain what homework will be given and how to do it.”* T3

was also of the opinion that to have good partnership it is more than the parent just dropping off and collecting their child and sending in what is required.

When examining what the parent experience of partnership with teachers was, it emerged that they hold a very different view to that of the teachers. The parents' partly felt that by making sure homework was completed and sending in everything their child needed, they were working in partnership with the teachers and school. P4 stated: *"It is about having the homework done and sending in any extra equipment or money when it is needed"*. P2 was of the same opinion as P4, that partnership involves having homework done and sending in what extra equipment or materials are needed. P3 had a different view, seeing working in a collaborative partnership as being involved with the quality of education her child is receiving, as well as supporting the teacher and what she is trying to achieve in the class room. This parent sits on the board of management and feels it has enhanced the partnership between her and the teacher. P3 said that: *"Partnership is about supporting the teacher and the school, and I do this by sitting on the board of management."* P1 was in agreement with P3 and expressed a similar view that by being involved in school life improves the partnership between teacher and parent.

Policies related to partnership

Teachers' and parents' had different views on the formal policies which were in place on how to contact the teacher, parent or the school if there is an issue. It is important that national schools have policies to ensure that both teachers and parents have a way to communicate with each other – that there is a procedure in place to have their concerns voiced and listened to if they feel there is an issue regarding a child. The question was put to both teachers and parents, whether they were aware of any policies or procedures in relation to how to communicate with each other. Teachers and parents had very different responses. All the teachers responded that there was a formal policy in place for parents to contact them or the school, and as part of that policy there was a procedure for the teacher to make contact with the parent if needed. T1 said: *"Yes, my school has a formal policy on how I contact a parent if there is an issue. There is also a section in the policy on how the parents should contact me or the school."* None of the teachers indicated if the parents were made aware of the policy. The three of teacher did not make any comment on whether parents were told where to find the school policies. The teacher who was a principal

stated *“all the school policies are on our website, or available as a hard copy to parents on request”*

Parents, when asked the same question, were all in agreement that they have not been informed about any formal policy on how to contact the school. All parents agreed that there was a note in the handbook they were given in relation to their child being absent from school, or in case someone different was picking up their child, to the effect that the information has to be put in writing. P3 stated: *“No. There was a line in the handbook we got saying if a child is not in school I have to send in a note saying why they were not in”*. P2 commented: *“No. I remember reading somewhere if I have to collect my child early or if someone not on the list has to do the pick-up I must put it in writing on the day.”* P1 and 4 responded with similar statements.

This finding was unexpected, and it points to a lack of communication between the school and home. This could have an impact on the quality of partnership between teachers and parents. Teachers may feel that parents can just call in to the school whenever it suits them, possibly causing interruption to the teacher’s day. It may also impact on parents who are potentially more nervous about contacting the teacher, as they may feel they are interrupting their day and taking up their time.

How teachers and parents encourage partnership

When teachers and parents were asked how they thought they could encourage partnership, the responses were similar. The teachers’ replies were on some issues different to those of the parents, but they agreed with the parents that there is a need for more meetings.

This would increase the demand on both the teachers’ and parents’ time. One respondent was a principal and stated: *“Working in partnership can be hard work and time consuming.”* Building partnership was a new experience for both teachers and parents. Both teachers and parents agreed that although they had early nervousness about how best to approach partnership, the majority of teachers and parents felt the effort it takes to encourage partnership has proven to be a positive experience for all involved. There were also times when encouraging partnership was a negative experience. T2 stated: *“Parents don’t really understand partnership*

and they think of it as an inconvenience.” T1 expressed the view that: “Trying to encourage parents to become active partners takes time and patience.”

Teachers thought they could encourage partnership with parents by having more meetings with them. They felt that partnership was built on trust and honesty. They also felt it was about knowing their students’ parents and what talents they might be willing to share with them. T2 said, *“For example, one of our new mums was a face painter and at Halloween I approached her to see would she be willing to face paint the children and we would collect a Euro per child for charity. She was delighted to be asked.”* T4 said: *“When I think about how I could encourage partnership with my parents, I think more frequent meeting with parents would help; one parent-teacher meeting a year, I feel, is not enough, especially in the junior class.”* T1 and 3 had similar responses. T2 had a slightly different view. She felt that it was about making parents see that they have a valuable contribution to make; she also felt that she did not know more than the parent about their child. Furthermore, the teachers found that asking parents what expectations they had of them was important. T2 stated, *“To encourage partnership I ask parents what they expect of me.”* T3 expressed the view: *“The best way for me to encourage partnership is to be open to parents’ concerns and to not dismiss them or make them feel like I know better than them.”*

Teachers also felt to build a positive partnership with parents it is import to involve the child. Teachers encourage social interaction and listening skill into partnership by asking children have they “any news” or have they done “anything exciting the evening before. T4 *“I like to ask the children in the morning how their evening was and if they have anything to share with the class.”* The teachers were in agreement they all did this and found it helped them to build on the relationship and partnership with parents as they can relate the information back to them. T1 *“it’s nice when a child tells me something good that is happening and I can mention it to them”*. Teachers were also in agreement that this process encouraged active listening with the children .T3 stated *“The children will listen to each other and ask question sometimes”*.

All the parents felt that they could get more involved in the school life, and that there should be more meetings with the teacher (this was also highlighted by the teachers). They felt they could be more open to helping and should not be afraid to

ask questions of the teacher in relation to homework or other issues. P3 said that: *“Well, I think I could be more open to helping within the school. I’m new to the area and don’t know many people but am willing to get involved.”* P4 was of the view: *“When it comes to parent-teacher meetings there could be more than one, or even leave it later in the year, I think it’s hard to know how a child is doing after a few weeks”*. P1 was unsure of how she could encourage partnership and stated, *“I don’t know really how I could improve partnership with the teacher.”* P2 felt that she could encourage partnership by being more open with the teacher, and willing to accept they may have different views. She said: *“I could improve partnership with the teacher by being open to anything the teacher may have to say to me, even if I don’t agree with it, and try and fix the issue.”*

Perception of partnership

When asked their views on the perception of partnership in the national schools in junior classes, there was overall consensus among the teachers and the parents that ‘partnership’ means working together to allow the child to have a positive experience of education. To have a good approach to partnership was expressed as key for the child’s best interest in the school system.

Communication

Communication was identified as key by both teachers and parents for working with each other in partnership. Both teachers and parents expressed the opinion that the development of good communication skills on both sides was critical to fostering partnership within a school setting. During the interviews, an interesting point was made by both teachers and parents: when communication fails and a misunderstanding arises, it is usually around the issue of a child’s behaviour. Teachers and parents were in agreement that rules of the school are important and should be understood by teachers, parents and children to ensure positive partnership is developed. The data collected showed that communication with teachers and parents takes place on a number of different levels. There are formal ways, such as parent-teacher meetings or secluded meetings about an issue, or informal communication, such as an informal chat at the school gate, or communication by newsletter. Teachers and parents agreed that the first interaction with the school is also a key to developing partnership.

T3 said: *“If you’re not communicating with the parents then the partnership isn’t going to be there.”* Whilst T2 felt that: *“Communication is important, because over time you’re getting to know the parents as well and building up a certain relationship, getting to know them, and you’re getting to know the kids from them as well.”* The line of communication should be open as much as possible, as communication with parents about their child is vital. Parents were thinking likewise, holding similar views to the teachers.

P1 felt: *“I feel that when sending my child into school for the first time I need to know I can talk to the teacher, if only to have a quick word to make sure all is ok.”* Having a positive partnership approach is considered as key factor for the child, the teacher and the parent, with particular regard to the child who is attending national school for the first time. Parents felt communication was important as when children go from pre-school to “big school”, it takes massive adjustment. P2: *“Coming from a play school room to the school room is a massive change for my child and working together in partnership with the teacher is very important.”* P3 said: *“I know partnership exists between me and the teacher when I can speak to them about anything.”*

Partnership when starting school

When examining how the partnership approaches are viewed, the teachers and the parents see it as key for children who are attending school for the first time. T4 said: *“It is such a big deal for a child to start school. I think it is so vital, to know a little about each child. I can only do this by communicating with the parents.”* T1 and T3 expressed similar views, saying that it is important to make the new children feel comfortable and involved in the class room as it makes the settling-in period a lot easier – and parents will also be more at ease leaving their child. T2 stated: *“If the child is happy and settled then the parent is happier and less stressed leaving their child, and this in turn will help with the building of trust and parents will be more likely to work in partnership with me.”*

Parents also agreed that the first number of weeks in school can be a major ordeal for a child. P1 said: *“If I and the teacher can work together to have a good partnership then my child will settle in better in the first few weeks in national school.”* P3 stated: *“The first time I went into the school I was so nervous. I thought the*

teacher was so welcoming and answered all the questions I had and made me feel relaxed." P2 and P4 were in agreement that for a child to settle well into school, teachers and parents must work in partnership to help the child in accepting their new environment.

Looking to the future at how partnership can be improved

This final theme addresses the future of parent/teacher partnership, and what both parties' expectations are. Throughout the interviews with the teachers and parents, there was the common and recurring thought that more needs to be done in order to develop partnership for the future. The following quotes signify a number of recommendations from the teachers and parents on how to improve the partnership.

Teacher-parent relationship

A question regarding the views on the relationship that the teachers have with the parents was put to both parties. Three of the teachers had the view that the relationship with the parents was good, and the parents were approachable and willing to listen to what the teachers had to say. The teachers also felt that for a good relationship they must be mindful of the way they are speaking to parents. Whilst T2 and T3 felt that they had a good relationship with the parents of the children in their class and that they are *"generally all fine, all very approachable"*, T3 felt that *"it's important when I'm speaking to parents to be aware of the language and tone I use"*. T1 had a different view on the relationship she had with the parents in her school. She felt that they could be difficult to work with. She made an interesting comment: *"Some parents can be more problematic than others and I have better relationship with some parents than others."* When the same question was asked of the parents, they had similar views to the teachers; P1, P2 and P3 all believed that they had a positive relationship with their child's teacher. P1 held the view: *"I have a great partnership with the teacher as I know she is there to listen to me if there is an issue."*

When the teachers and parents were asked their views on how the partnership and the relationship would develop in the future, both teachers and parents had similar opinions. They felt that as time goes on, and the better they get to know each other, the relationship would develop and this, in turn, would ensure that a positive partnership is established.

All the teachers were positive about the future. Some of the respondents, who have been teaching for a number of years, expressed the view that it takes time to build a partnership with parents, and felt that this partnership was built on trust. T3 expressed her view by saying: *“By asking parents to get involved or for their opinion, it makes for a better and stronger bond with parents”*. As a result of having a strong bond with the parents, T1 said: *“When the children move to the next room I miss the parents because I have worked hard to get to know the parents and build a good working partnership with them”*. T2 also brought up the level of progression by saying: *“When a child and parent start in September, by now you can see a difference because you get to know the parent and they get to know me, we become comfortable with each other.”* The teachers have shown that the partnership is a process that takes time and is built on trust.

P2, P3 and P4 are all in agreement with each other that they see their partnership progressing into the future, as the longer the child is in school, the better they get to know the teacher and the school. P4 has had plenty of experience in dealing with teachers and schools, and with that in mind she in particular shared the positive view: *“I have seen how the partnership has changed and I feel that we now live in a more open society, everyone can see the benefit of a good working partnership with teachers.”*

Overall Summary of Results

This section described the results of the qualitative study which explored partnership between teachers and parents in junior classes in national school. It presents the findings based on the research questions, objectives and themes that emerged from the data collection. The findings were presented under main theme headings and sub theme headings; they were illustrated by using narrative from the interviews.

The partnership as collaboration focused on many aspects of the experience and application of partnership in the school setting. All respondents specified that there are numerous benefits in relation to how partnership is experienced and applied; however, they also expressed that there are barriers to involvement, and to finding the correct level of partnership. By having good communication skills and getting both sides to work together, it is possible to build on already existing partnerships.

The concept of partnership highlighted the teachers' and parents' views on what they understood the term 'partnership' to mean within the school setting; teachers and parents were also asked whether they viewed the idea of being in a positive partnership with each other as key for the child's education. The results showed large similarities in opinions amongst the teachers and parents. Both teachers and parents felt that the development of partnership is supported by good communication between the two parties, which leads to a positive experience for the child, and encourages the child's learning and development in the school setting.

Looking into the future with regards to partnership suggests that a lot more research and implementation of more policies regarding partnership with teachers and parents needs to take place. Having a constant open line of communication between teachers, parents and children is important, as was highlighted by both the teachers and the parents. Information on the policy regarding making contact with the teacher should be looked at and given to all parents.

Section 4: Discussion

Introduction

This study explored the views, perspectives and expectations of both parents and teachers in relation to partnership between those two parties in national school junior classes. The study investigated parents' and teachers' views on working in collaboration to achieve partnership, their perception of partnership, and how they thought partnership could be improved in the junior classes of national schools in the future. This section will discuss the findings in relation to the literature, as well as their implications, alongside suggestions for future research and some recommendations. Finally, it will offer an evaluation of method, and conclude with a summary and some final recommendations for the future.

Summary of Findings

The results and findings of the qualitative study, which explored partnership with teachers and parents in the national school in junior classes, are presented in the following; based on the research questions, objectives and themes that emerged from the data collection.

The concept of partnership highlighted what teachers' and parents' views and understanding of partnership were. Teachers and parents realised the importance of the approach which is used is to develop partnership in national schools, as the wrong approach could damage partnership. The findings showed a consensus amongst both teachers and parents that partnership was viewed as working in collaboration with one another. To develop partnership, the findings showed, good communication was one of the most important factors, according to both teachers and parents. They felt that good communication leads to good partnership, and this, in turn, has a positive effect on the child and their learning, development and experience of education in national school. The teachers and parents were positive in their views about the quality of their relationship with each other. All participants felt that, to achieve good partnership, it was vital to work with each other. The research showed there are many benefits linked with partnership, depending on how

partnership is implemented and experienced. There are also some barriers to finding the correct partnership strategy, that is, the one that works best for the school and parents. Looking into the future and at how partnership can be improved, based on the findings, it seems that more research into how partnership is implemented is required. In relation to the formal policies which were in place, it was found that these need to be communicated better to parents. The findings clearly show that taking a collaborative approach and having continuous open lines of communication between teachers and parents is extremely important, as both those points were highlighted by all respondents.

Partnership requires collaboration

All respondents in the study felt that, for partnership to develop, teachers and parents must collaborate to achieve a positive partnership. Both teachers and parents acknowledged that partnership in education between parents and teachers is a relatively new concept in the educational system. Partnership for parents in education is part of Government policy. Social Partners have officially recognised the promotion of parental involvement in the education of their children as a vital strategy of educational policy and practice (I.N.T.O, 1997).

According to Aistear (2000), partnership is about teachers and parents working together to achieve the best possible educational outcome for the child. Teachers and parents both recognised that the parents have the most influence on a child's education. Ireland has written into its Constitution under Article 42.1 that the family is the primary educator of children. Bunreacht na hÉireann, in 1937 recognised the family as the main educators of their children. There is no reference to any other body such as the state or schools which may have an interest in the care or the welfare of the children outside the home. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 under Article 18 says: *"parents have a duty to provide for the education of their children."* The UNCRC is not a legal framework, but it can have an influence on the laws in Ireland. The UNCRC along with the Irish Constitution put the duty on parents to ensure that their children are educated within the means of the family. As the educational system has evolved it would appear this has been forgotten. *"home is most important place for a child to learn."* This would show that teachers are aware of the fact they are not the primary educators of children but it is in fact the parents.

Partnership with parents in education is part of Government policy. Through the Programme for Economic and Social Progress, the Government and the Social Partners have officially recognised the promotion of parental involvement in the education of their children as a vital strategy of educational policy and practice. The Department of Education states that partnership with the family is vital (Department of Education, 1991; Galvin, Higgins, Mahony, 2009). In 1991, the Department of Education and Science issued a circular in relation to the setting-up of parent associations to encourage better partnership between school and home. This highlighted the fact that there was a need for more development of policies for partnership. Based on the research that has been carried out for this study, the views of the Department of Education and Skills on how best to develop partnership is unclear. With this in mind, it is important to highlight the finding that none of the parents who partook in the study were aware of a formal policy on how to communicate with the teacher or with the school. In contrast to the parents, all the teachers replied there was a formal policy in place on how to communicate with parents and how parents communicate with the school. This shows a breakdown in communication between the school and parents, which could undermine the level of partnership between teacher and parent.

Concept of partnership

The theoretical perspective of partnership in education is something which the researcher feels had not been explored fully by either teachers or parents prior to the research being carried out until the term 'partnership' was introduced. Teachers are now more aware of the importance of working in partnership with parents, as this is something they would have learned during the course of their education and training. However, as parents may have not gone to college or may have different educational backgrounds, they may not be aware of these theories. There is now a greater body of knowledge in this area, thanks to a number of influential theorists such as Comenius, Pestalozzi, Montessori, Froebel, McMillan, Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner, and so on. An important theory in highlighting the important role of parents in education was that of Bronfenbrenner. One parent said, "*home is an extension of what is being learned and talked about in school*". This would show that parents are aware of the fact that school is an important part of their child's life.

All respondents of the study were in agreement that the concept of partnership was about working together with the best interest of the child as their main priority. This was especially evident in the remarks one parent made, when she stated what her understanding of the term 'partnership' meant to her: "*When I think about partnership with teachers, I think of how I work with the teacher to make sure my child's education is the best it can be.*" This shows how important it is to have partnership between the teacher and the parent to allow the building of relationships. As stated in the literature, Aistear (NCCA, 2009) defined partnership as a practice that "*involves parents, families and practitioners working together to benefit children. Each recognises, respects and values what the other does and says. Partnership involves responsibility on both sides*". It is crucial to note that having a positive partnership approach is understood as key when children are starting school for the first time. Having teachers and parents working in collaboration with each other aids the child in feeling more comfortable and settled in school. One teacher in the interview stated, "*when I think of partnership with parents I think it is how I work with the parent.*". This point it further echoed by Kay (2004), who has confidence that parents have skills they can share to be active partners in educating their child. The skills the parents have can aid the teacher in their work by bring in different ideas and expertise.

Experience of partnership

This study found that the respondents held a variety of views with regard to partnership and how it is understood by teachers and parents. Both teachers and parents, however, were of the view that partnership involves an intensive effort. Based on the findings of the study, the quality of parent/teacher partnership is important for the child, as they are at the centre of that relationship. There are numerous opinions amongst the teachers and parents on how partnership should be addressed. All respondents agreed that having a positive partnership is an important part of school and both teachers and parents can do more to improve the partnership. One teacher said: "*Generally all parents are fine, all very approachable.*" The parents had a similar view to the teachers and felt that, when it came to partnership, they were having a positive experience overall. According to one parent, "*I have a great partnership with the teacher as I know she is there to listen to me if there is an issue*". It is important to highlight that they can be negatives to

partnership. Teachers expressed that to be involved in a positive partnership, they had to invest in it; they felt it added to their work load and that they had to be extremely well organised, as the preparation time in the morning or evening could be taken up by communicating with parents. One teacher stated: *“I need to be very prepared if parents want a chat, it can take up a lot of time.”* Teachers felt they must try and remember to ask about different parts of the child’s life outside school. This, they felt, was an enjoyable part of their work. These social interactions with children, like asking if anyone has any news or did they do anything interesting, could take up a large amount of time in the morning. Nevertheless, teachers felt this was important, as children would learn how to interact with others and how to listen.

When looking at partnership and how it is developed, it is important to acknowledge that there are barriers to partnership between teachers and parents. The different kinds of barriers to partnership, which are faced by teachers and parents, were discussed by Palaiologou (2013). These include a lack of time, conflict of opinions, cultural differences, and parents trying to have more control than necessary. One parent stated: *“I work two jobs and find it hard to find time to fit in being involved in the school.”* The respondents to this study highlighted a number of issues which act as barriers to parental partnership; the most predominant of these was lack of time due to work commitments and parents’ negative attitudes towards involvement. This relates to earlier findings from two separate studies, which also argue that work commitments (Harris and Goodall, 2007) and parents’ negative attitudes towards parental partnership and involvement (Sapungan and Sapungan, 2014) are the most quoted barriers to parental involvement. Teachers felt that a parent’s idea that, once they had the homework done with their child and provided whatever was needed in school, they were working in partnership, was a barrier to a good relationship. One teacher said, *“when parents have the homework done and everything sent in then they feel that is partnership”*. From the findings in the research, the parents had no involvement with conflict, but did feel that they could be more open with teachers when they were unsure about something. One respondent said: *“If I’m unsure about something I will usually ask another parent first.”* Parents felt if this barrier was overcome, then the partnership between teachers and parents would work better. If a sense of understanding could be developed, it would improve the existing partnership. The experiences of partnership by both teachers and parents were

shown to be mostly positive; still, teachers as well as parents did highlight some negative aspects to partnership. One teacher thought *“to be involved in partnership is time-consuming”*. A parent said, *“working two jobs I don’t have the time”*. The issue of time was also highlighted by Palaiologou (2013).

Attitudes towards parental partnership

All respondents of the study felt that the attitude towards parental partnership was vital. If there was not a positive attitude towards partnership to begin with, then it would be extremely hard to achieve positive partnership. Parental attitudes to partnership contribute to effective partnership between teacher and parent and impact on these relationships. Research has put an emphasis on the importance of said parent involvement and partnership in the school setting. The partnership between teacher and parent is necessary for a child’s learning and attitude towards school (Dauber and Epstein, 1989). Dauber and Epstein (1989) conducted qualitative research in elementary and middle schools to observe the extent of parent involvement between school and home. The findings of their study showed that teachers reported a restricted amount of parent partnership and involvement within the school setting; however, parents reported they felt they were involved in active partnership and involved in their child’s school. These finding can be seen reflected in this study, where one parent said: *“It is about having the home work done and sending in any extra equipment or money when it is needed.”* The teachers, on the other hand, felt partnership with parents required more than that.

Communication

When examining how communication was a key aspect of partnership, all respondents of the study were in agreement that it is indeed essential in trying to develop a positive relationship. One of Aistear’s key themes is communicating (NCCA, 2009). Aistear recognises the important and influential role of parents and places great importance on building partnerships between teachers and parents. When teachers and parents are working together it can improve children’s learning and development (NCCA, 2009). One teacher said, *“if you’re not communicating with the parents then the partnership isn’t going to be there”*. Teachers and Parents felt that opening the lines of communication was important, as starting school for the first

time marks a big change in the life of a child. A parent said: *“Coming from a play school room to the school room is a massive change for my child and working together in partnership with the teacher is very important.”* One teacher was in agreement, saying: *“It is such a big deal for a child to start school. I think it is so vital, to know a little about each child. I can only do this by communicating with the parents.”* Epstein (2001) argues that opening the lines for good communication is vital to ensure that partnership is developed in a positive way.

Barriers to partnership

Another point of interest in relation to barriers to partnership was the following: when the researcher asked teachers and parents about a formal policy regarding communication with each other, they both had very different answers. All teachers answered in the affirmative, saying that a formal policy was in place. However, none of the parents were aware of this policy. One parent replied with: *“No, is there one?”* This shows a breakdown in communication between the school and the parents. When parents are sending their child to school for the first time, they are likely to be unaware of all the different policies and procedures. This is of significance, as research shows policies that encourage partnership make parental involvement more likely to occur (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, and Lopez, 1997, cited in McDermott, 2010). However, Shartrand et al. (1997) continue by arguing that the teachers need to be prepared with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively work in partnership with parents. If teachers are unaware that the parents have not been informed of the policy, it can make communication and partnership difficult. One teacher said: *“Of course my school has a formal policy on how to communicate with parents and how they can contact me.”* This would show that school management are failing to communicate with parents on the most effect way to context the teacher or the school.

Harris and Goodall (2007), Walker and Berthelsen (2010) and Otter (2014) all highlighted that another barrier to partnership was the socio-economic status of the family. They found that the parents who were more involved were usually those who had a higher level of education. Contradicting this, in this study one teachers stated: *“In my experience it’s the parents who have lower paid jobs and who are less*

educated who are more willing to be involved in schools.” This was an unexpected finding. The research would point to the fact that it is parents who have more education and resources that are more likely to be involved in school activities.

Benefits of partnership

All the respondents of the study were in agreement that there are benefits to be gained from partnership for teachers and parents, but most importantly for the child (Otter, 2014). A parent noted, *“I have seen how the partnership has changed and I feel that we now live in a more open society, everyone can see the benefit of good working partnership with teachers”*. Jeynes (2012) and Gilleece (2015) argue that the parent/teacher partnership has a massive impact on the child. Studies by Senechal and LeFevre (2002), Sheppard (2009) and Lau, Li and Rao (2011) highlight the benefit of a positive partnership between teacher and parent. One finding was that a child’s behaviour and attendance was better when the parent was involved in the school. This was backed up by a teacher saying, *“I have found the child behaviour can be better.”* Partnership is important with all parents, as it has an influence on the partnership between the child and the teacher as well. Mhic Mhathúna & Taylor (2012) expressed that children learn about social interaction by watching how others interact in a social context. This was highlighted by a teacher who states, *“partnership to me is interacting with parents to get to know the child.”* The parents had a similar view. One parent said: *“Partnership is about interacting with and supporting the teacher.”* This demonstrates the importance of the teachers’ and parents’ involvement in partnership with the child (Jeynes, 2012; Gilleece, 2015).

Importance of partnership

In this study all the respondents were of the opinion that positive partnership was important to ensure that the child could achieve the best possible academic outcome. Research shows, that the quality of early years experiences in education has a significant influence on child development and future academic success (Essa, 2014; Reardon, 2009; Baldock, 2001). *“If the child is happy and settled, then the parent is happier and less stressed leaving their child, then the child is more likely to do well in school”*, according to one respondent in the study. Evidence from previous research has established that the best outcome for the children is achieved when teachers and parents work together within a positive partnership. Parents are viewed as the gate keepers to knowledge on everything about their child and what is in their

best interest. One teacher participating in this study is of the view that, if she knows something about the child, then the child will be more likely to do well in school: “*I think it is so vital, to know a little about each child.*” Parents are entitled to take part in each aspect of their child’s life. Aistear states that “a child’s most important relationship is the one they have with their parents” (NCCA, 2009). The teachers are seen as another part of the child’s education process and they are working with the child to develop their learning.

Teachers and parents highlighted the fact that it can be stressful for a child (and their parents) going to school for the first time. One teacher said, “*It is such a big deal for a child to start school*”. This was further reinforced by a parent: “*The first time I went into the school I was so nervous. I thought the teacher was so welcoming and answered all the questions I had and made me feel relaxed*”. This highlights the need for partnership to be encouraged and practiced from the first interaction between the teacher and the parent.

Teacher parent relationship

Most respondents of the study were in agreement that the relationship between teacher and parent was crucial. The majority of teachers felt they had a good relationship with their students’ parents; they also found the way in which they spoke to parents, and the language they used, important. One teacher expressed this by saying, “*it’s important when I’m speaking to parents to be aware of the language and tone I use*”. Pestalozzi believed that for children the teaching received from their parents will always be central, and that the school teacher’s role is to provide an environment which supports and develops the learning from home (Mhic Mhathúna and Taylor, 2012). One teacher was of the view that “*some parents can be more problematic than others and I have better relationships with some parents than others*”. This will have an impact on the level of partnership shared with the parent; if the teacher is finding it hard to work in partnership, then the child may suffer.

Evaluation of method and suggestions for future research

The overall aim of the research project was to explore teacher and parent views, perspectives and beliefs regarding partnership in junior classes in national school. The researcher was successful in accomplishing the aims, together with the stated objectives, which were outlined in the research project. This was achieved by

researching the literature at length along with the completion of interviews, which contained direct and indirect questions.

All the participants were either teachers of children in junior classes or parents of children in junior classes. The interviews were especially valuable, as the appropriate information for the research project was gained from the respondents. It allowed the researcher to ask direct and indirect questions to obtain vital information. The interviews were between 30-45 minutes which was long enough to get the information and a short enough time that the respondents were not feeling under pressure to answer questions. The researcher had concerns about interviewing only eight respondents – four teachers and four parents – as this group represented only a small sample of people involved in junior classes in national schools. This may have led to not receiving the full depth of knowledge which would be required. For this research project, the interview method was selected for the respondents. This guaranteed that rich in-depth material was received from the teachers and the parents. The interview guide was planned so that the questions would attain the significant information. By doing this, the research objectives were achieved

However, the researcher feels that she was successful in attaining the required outcomes from both the teachers and the parents.

The findings from this research project are limited, as it was a small-scale study. This means that the findings were not representative of all the teachers and parents who are involved with children in junior classes in national schools. If a similar research project on a larger scale was carried out, it might yield different results, as it would incorporate responses from a larger range of respondents. This would provide an enhanced indication on how partnership is experienced and implemented by a larger number of teachers and parents.

Section 5: Conclusion

It can be recognised that partnership between teachers and parents within the school setting can be empowering when all aspects of the triangle – i.e. the teachers, the parents and the children – are working together. This can only be achieved when schools, teachers and parents are willing to adopt a positive partnership approach which everyone will benefit from; this can be achieved by having an open line of communication. As shown in the study, both teachers and parents were in agreement that partnership is key to a happy relationship between teachers, parents and – most importantly – children.

In the course of this research, teachers and parents took the opportunity to highlight their different views on what the term ‘partnership’ within the school setting means to them. Teachers saw partnership as working together with the aim of providing the child with the best possible experience of education at an early age, whereas parents had the view that as long as they provided all the essentials, such as having homework completed or sending in additional equipment, they were fulfilling their part of the partnership. It was also obvious that communication was an important component of partnership between teachers and parents, most importantly with the children. Clear communication and the resulting improved partnership can only have positive outcomes for the child and their education experience.

In this study, it became apparent from the teachers’ and parents’ experiences and views, that a partnership does exist. The teachers and parents were able to express the way they felt this partnership could be improved, but they were also aware of the barriers which might work against building partnership. As a result, both parties felt having a positive partnership with one another would impact positively on the school-going child.

The researcher has formed the belief, based on the information provided in this research project, that the future of partnership should be explored more extensively through research. Also, more information regarding policies about partnership between teachers, the school and the parents should be made available to parents. The question needs to be asked why this information is not being relayed to parents.

The researcher concludes that additional policies exclusively on partnership are needed, and these need to be communicated to parents.

Section 6: Recommendations

Having completed this research project, the researcher would like to make the following recommendations:

1. There needs to be a clear definition of 'partnership' within policies, which should be communicated to parents.
2. Strategies should be put in place to encourage and promote active partnership between teachers and parents.
3. The voice of fathers and male national school teachers teaching junior and senior infancies should be heard by including them in further research.
4. A larger amount of policies need to be implemented in relation to partnership with parents and its importance for the child.

References

- Anderson, C. (2010). "Presenting and Evaluating Qualitative Research". *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*. 74(8), 141.
- Baldock, P. (2001). *Regulating early years services*. London: David Fulton.
- Barnardos. (2017). 'Preparing Children for 'Big School''. [Internet]. Available at: <https://www.barnardos.ie/media-centre/news/latest-news/preparing-children-for-big-school-top-tips-for-parents.html> [Accessed 12 January 2018].
- Bell, J. and Waters, S. (2014). *Doing your Research Project, a guide for first-time researchers*. London: Open University Press.
- Boyatzis, R. (1998). *Transforming Qualitative Information*. Sage: Cleveland
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods*. (3rd ed). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods*. (4th ed). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods*. (5th ed). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bunreacht na hÉireann. (2013). *Constitution of Ireland*. Dublin: The Stationary Office.
- Castillo-Montoya, M. (2016). Preparing for Interview Research: The Interview Protocol Refinement Framework. *The Qualitative Report*, 21 (5), p.811-831.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. London: Sage Publications.

Dauber, S.L., & Epstein, J.L. (1989) *Parent attitudes and practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools*. Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools. P.1-29

Department of Education and Skills. (1991). *Circular 24/91*. Dublin. The Stationary Office.

Doherty, J. and Hughes, M. (2009). *Child Development: Theory and Practice 0-11*. London: Pearson Longman.

Epstein, J, L. (2001). *School, family and community partnerships*. Boulder CO: Westview Press.

Essa, E. L. (2014). *Introduction to Early Childhood Education*. USA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Galvin, J., Higgins, A. and Mahony, K. (2009). "FAMILY, SCHOOL, COMMUNITY EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP". Mary Immaculate College: Limerick. [pdf]

Available from

http://www.mic.ul.ie/ted/Documents/FINAL%20FSCEP%20report%20240709_LRes.pdf [Accessed 25 January 2018].

Giddens, A. (2009). *Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gilleece, L. (2015). 'Parental involvement and pupil reading achievement in Ireland: Findings from PIRLS 2011'. *International Journal of Educational Research*, Vol 72, 23-36.

Harris, A. and Goodall, J. (2007). 'Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement Do They Know They Matter?' [pdf] Available from <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6639/1/DCSF-RW004.pdf> [Accessed 30 December 2017].

Hayes, N. (2013). *Early Years Practice, Getting it right from the start*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.

Hoffman, E. A. (2007). Open-Ended Interviews, Power, and Emotional Labor. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3), p. 318-346.

Hornby, G. and Lafaele, R. (2011). 'Barriers to parental involvement in education: an explanatory model'. *Educational Review*, vol. 63 (1): 37 – 52. [pdf] Available from <http://parentschoolrelationships.wikispaces.com/file/view/Hornby+2011+Barriers+to+parental+involvement+in+education.pdf> [Accessed 20 January 2018].

I.N.TO. *Parental Involvement. Possibilities for Partnership* (1997). [Internet] Available from <https://www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/PublicationsPre2000/ParentalInvolvement.pdf> [Accessed 30 December 2017].

Jeynes, W, H. (2012). 'A Meta-Analysis of the Efficacy of Different *Types of Parental Involvement Programs for Urban Students*'. *Urban Education*, vol. 47 (4): 706 – 742. [Internet] Available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258198618_A_Meta-Analysis_of_the_Efficacy_of_Different_Types_of_Parental_Involvement_Programs_for_Urban_Students [Accessed 30 December 2017].

Jowett, S., Baginskym M and M. McDonald-McNeill (1991), *Building Bridges - Parental Involvement in Schools*, Berkshire: Nfer-Nelson.

Kay, J. (2004). *"A Practical Guide: Good Practice in the Early Years."* 2 Edition. London. Bloomsbury Academic.

Kvale, S. (1996). *"Interviews An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing"*, Sage Publications.

Lau, E, Y, H., Li, H. and Rao, N. (2011). '*Parental involvement and children's readiness for school in China*'. *Educational Research*, vol.53 (1): 95 – 113.

Mc Dermott, M. (2010). '*Early Childhood Staff's Understandings and Practices of Parent Involvement in Private Early Childhood Services: An Exploratory Study*' (Master's thesis). Dublin: Dublin Institute of Technology Ireland.

Mhathúna, M & Taylor, M. (2012). *"Early Childhood Education & Care: An Introduction for Students in Ireland"*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.

Mishra, L. (2012). '*Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Care Education: a Study*'. *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 2 (2): 22 -

27. [Internet] Available from <http://article.sapub.org/10.5923.j.ijpbs.20120202.04.html> [Accessed 30 December 2017].

Nalls, A. M., Mullis, R. L., Cornille, T. A., Mullis, A. K., & Jeter, N. (2010). 'How Can We Reach Reluctant Parents in Childcare Programs?'. *Early Child Development and Care*, vol. 180 (8): 1053-1064.

National Parents Council. (2010). *Working effectively as a Parent Association*

Achieving best practice. [Internet] Available from

<http://www.npc.ie/attachments/e68cbc61-8643-4772-b405-4a732b037ad1.PDF>

[Accessed 29 December 2017]

NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment). (2009). "*Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*". Dublin: NCCA.

NCCA. (2009). *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework: Principles and themes*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Nokali, N, E., Bachman, H, J. and Votruba-Dizal, E. (2010). '*Parent Involvement and Children's Academic and Social Development in Elementary School*'. *Child Development*, vol. 81 (3): 988 – 1005. [Internet] Available from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2973328/> [Accessed 30 December 2017].

O'Brien, M. (2007). Mothers' emotional care work in education and its moral imperative. *Gender and Education*, Vol. 19, (2) 159–177.

OECD. (n.d). '*Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)*'. [pdf] Available from <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/49322514.pdf> [Accessed 07 January 2018].

OCED. (n.d). '*Norway*'. [pdf] Available from

http://www.google.ie/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiGuuy02c7JAhUBIhQKHhHwAikQFggxMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cecde.ie%2Fenglish%2Fpdf%2FMaking%2520Connections%2FMC%2520Chapter%25203.pdf&usg=AFQjCNEQMkXIUmzdmc9v_YwD7kkvp3fXkw&sig2=dvjSjrvITPvNrv79ILhzYg [Accessed 09 January 2018].

Otter, C, V. (2014). 'Family resources and mid-life of education: a longitudinal study of mediating influence of childhood parental involvement'. *British Educational Research Journal*, vol.40 (3): 555-574.

Palaiologou, I. (2013). "The Early Years Foundation Stage: Theory and Practice". 2 Edition. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Reardon, D. (2009). *Achieving early years professional status*. London: SAGE.

Sarantakos, S. (1998). *Social Research*. (2nd ed). Basingstoke: Macmillian.

Saunders, M, NK. (2012). "Choosing research participants". In Symon G and Cassell C (eds) *The Practice of Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. London: Sage 37-55.

Sapungan, G, M. and Sapungan, R, M. (2014). 'Parental Involvement in Child's Education: Importance, Barriers and Benefits'. *Asian Journal of Management Science and Education*, vol. 3 (2): 42 – 48. [Internet] Available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283539737_Parental_Involvement_in_Child%27s_Education_Importance_Barriers_and_Benefits [Accessed 08 December 2015].

Seginer, R. (2006). 'Parents' Educational Involvement: A Developmental Ecology Perspective'. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, vol. 6 (1): 1 – 48. [Internet] Available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248942466_Parents'_Educational_Involvement_A_Developmental_Ecology_Perspective [Accessed 09 January 2018].

Senechal, M. and LeFevre, J, A. (2002). 'Parental Involvement in the Development of Children's Reading Skill: A Five-Year Longitudinal Study'. *Child Development*, vol. 73 (2): 445 – 460. [pdf] Available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/11416841_Parental_Involvement_in_the_Development_of_Children%27s_Reading_Skill_A_Five-Year_Longitudinal_Study [Accessed 07 January 2018].

Shartrand, A., Weiss, H., Kreider, H., & Lopez M. (1997). 'New Skills for New Schools: Preparing Teachers in Family Involvement, Harvard Family Research Project'. [pdf] Available from

<http://www.hfrp.org/content/download/1145/48650/file/skills.pdf> [Accessed 01 March 2018].

Sheppard, A. (2009). 'School attendance and attainment: poor attenders' perceptions of schoolwork and parental involvement in their education'. *British Journal of Special Education*, vol. 36 (2): 104 – 111.

Smith, J., Wohlstetter, P., Kuzin, C, A. and De Pedro, K. (2011). 'Parent Involvement in Urban Charter Schools: New Strategies for Increasing Participation'. *The School Community Journal*, vol. 21 (1): 71-94. [pdf] Available from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ932201.pdf> [Accessed 12 January 2018].

United Nations General Assembly (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html> [Accessed 6 March 2018].

Wilder, S. (2014). 'Effects of parental involvement on academic achievement: a meta-synthesis'. *Educational Review*, vol. 66 (3) 377 – 397. [pdf] Available from http://www.google.ie/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiguuCZxszJAhWlbR4KHd9VDsoQFggjMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tandfonline.com%2Fdoi%2Fpdf%2F10.1080%2F00131911.2013.780009&usq=AFQjCNFCgGE1ZhSqhbhg1UrXoAstZ_xuUg&sig2=pbijHIVhOQIxbiTKw5Glw [Accessed 08 January 2018].

Wyatt-Smith, C., Ellins, J. and Gunn, S. (2011). *Multiple Perspectives on Difficulties in Learning Literacy and Numeracy*. Netherlands: Springer.

Wyse, S, E. (2016). "Difference between Qualitative Research vs. Quantitative Research". [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.snapsurveys.com/blog/what-is-the-difference-between-qualitative-research-and-quantitative-research/> [Accessed 22nd March 2018].

Appendices

Appendix 1 : Questions for Parents

Question's for parents

1. Do they use those means of communication. Social media twitter, Facebook, what app. Website. Parent teacher meeting, information evenings, newsletter, email, informal chat at gate? Any other?
2. Which means of communication do you use? What are the main ones? Anything here not relevant for your school?
3. How can they be better partners?
4. What types of "messages" / information gets communicated by the methods your school uses?
5. What if there is an issue such as homework not been done or child having changeling behaviour, how do you communicate about that?
6. If you want to meet your child's teacher / a pupil's parent, what happens? What's the policy on that? Is there one?
7. Do you think you need to keep up with what your child is doing in school?
8. How do you know how to help your child?
9. Does the teacher know that you are helping your child? That you are not sure about how to help with homework, issues with friends?
10. What is your understanding of partnership within the school setting between teacher\parent?
11. How often will your school have regular meetings such as parent teacher meetings, information evenings?
12. How often will your school send out newsletters, text messages or other communication
13. Do you think that there is enough communication within the school setting between teacher\parent?

14. How do you know if communications between you and parent\teacher is received and understood?
15. How would you like teacher\parent to respond to the information given by you?
16. What do you do to encourage the partnership to work?
17. Do you think partnership with teacher\parent is important? If so why?
18. What do you think you could do to improve the partnership?
19. Do you think the school could do more to develop partnership between teacher\parent

Appendix 2 : Questions for Teachers

1. Do they use those means of communication. Social media twitter, Facebook, what app. Website. Parent teacher meeting, information evenings, newsletter, email, informal chat at gate? Any other?
2. Which means of communication do you use? What are the main ones? Anything here not relevant for your school?
3. How can they be better partners?
4. What types of “messages” / information gets communicated by the methods your school uses?
5. What if there is an issue such as homework not been done or child having changeling behaviour, how do you communicate about that?
6. If you want to meet your child’s teacher / a pupil’s parent, what happens? What’s the policy on that? Is there one?
7. Do you think parents should help their children at home?
8. Do you think they know how to help?
9. Do you know if parents are helping children at home?
10. What is your understanding of partnership within the school setting between teacher\parent?
11. How often will your school have regular meetings such as parent teacher meetings, information evenings?
12. How often will your school send out newsletters, text messages or other communication
13. Do you think that there is enough communication within the school setting between teacher\parent?
14. How do you know if communications between you and parent\teacher is received and understood?

15. How would you like teacher\parent to respond to the information given by you?
16. What do you do to encourage the partnership to work?
17. Do you think partnership with teacher\parent is important? If so why?
18. What do you think you could do to improve the partnership?
19. Do you think the school could do more to develop partnership between teacher\parent

Appendix 3: Consent form



Consent form for participants in a research study:

Teacher parent partnership in junior classes in national schools

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1. I have read and understood the information about the study, as provided in the information sheet.
2. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and my participation.
3. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study.
4. I understand I can withdraw from the interview without giving reasons or being questioned.
5. The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained to me.
6. I agree that my interview can be audio recorded.
7. I understand that no identifying information (ie. my name or the name of the school) will be used in the typed transcript of the interview or in the final report.
8. I understand that the research supervisor may have access to this data and will preserve the confidentiality of the data.
9. I understand I can request to see a copy of the typed transcript of the interview.
10. I understand that I may withdraw my data up until 31 March 2018.
11. I understand the information I give may appear in a final report which will be published on the AIT library website.

Signature

Date

Appendix 4: Information sheet



Information sheet for

Partnership with teacher and parent in the junior classes in national school.

My name is Michelle O'Malley and I am a postgraduate student at Athlone Institute of Technology. I am currently carrying out a Masters in Child and Youth Studies.

The study will focus on partnership with teachers and parents of children in the junior classes in national school.

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. You have been invited to take part in the study as you are either a teacher or a parent of children in junior classes in national school. Please note that participants will be chosen from different schools.

Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or if you would like more information.

What do I have to do?

I would be grateful if you could take the time to participate in an interview. The interview should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. If you agree I will audio record the interview.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the interview at any stage without giving reasons or being questioned.

Will anyone know I have taken part?

No one will know you have taken part. Your data will be kept in a locked press. The research supervisor may have access to the data and will preserve all confidentiality.

What happens to the audio recording?

The audio file will be transcribed and no identifying information (ie. your name or the name of the school) will be used in the typed transcript. You may request to see a copy of the transcript and you may withdraw your information up until 31 March 2018.

What will happen to the information I provide?

The information will be included in my final report. A copy of this report will be published on the AIT library website after 30th September 2018. All transcripts will be destroyed after this date.

A short summary of the results of the research can be made available to you after 30th May 2018 if you wish.

Should you require any further information please contact me on 0876126315 or a00248256@student.ait.ie

Appendix 5: Letter to principal



Dear Principal,

My name is Michelle O'Malley and I am a postgraduate student at Athlone Institute of Technology. I am currently carrying out a Masters in Child and Youth Studies. The study will focus on partnership with teachers and parents of children in the junior classes in national school.

The study will focus on partnership with teachers and parents of children in the junior classes in national school.

I would like to ask your permission to interview the teacher of the junior classes.

Your school or the name of your teacher will not appear in the report.

If you wish I can provide you with a short summary of my finding in June.

Please see the attached information sheet for more information.

If you have any other questions please contact me at a00246258@student.ait.ie or at 0876126315.

Kind regards

Michelle O'Malley

I _____ give permission for the junior class teacher to be interviewed as part of this piece of research.

Date: