

Early School Leaving: Predictive Risk Factors

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Early School Leaving: Predictive Risk Factors

Dr. Louise Heeran Flynn

This report reviews extensive national and international research in the field of Early School Leaving. In keeping with research in the area, the report contends that Early School Leaving must be understood as the final step in a process of disengagement that begins early in a child's life. The predictive risk factors which have been identified in the literature as leading to Early School Leaving will be presented. The report illustrates that the risk factors for Early School Leaving are highly complex and intertwined. What characterises the measures most successful at targeting Early School Leaving, as opposed to the unsuccessful ones, is that these successful approaches view Early School Leaving in an holistic manner. As such, they pay due cognisance to the multifaceted ecological systems in which a child moves. As a result, predictive risk factors must reflect this understanding and consider the multifarious risk factors that can exist both outside the school and inside the school. This report utilises Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986, 1994) Ecological Systems Theory as a conceptual and theoretical framework to shape and explain the relationship between the risk factors identified in the literature. For the purposes of this report, risk factors will be classified in to two categories: Individual and Social factors and School and Systemic factors (Rumberger and Lim, 2008; Lyche, 2010).

I

1.1 Context

Early School Leaving (ESL) is regarded as a significant societal issue, not just in Ireland, but across Europe and the developing world. Education is considered a key driver of economic and social success for individuals, employers and nations (OECD, 2006) and as such, Early School Leaving has a cost for the individual and for society. Early School Leaving may lead individuals to a weaker position in society and in the labour market (European Commission, 2009). Predictions for future skills needs in Europe suggest that in the future, only 1 in 10 jobs will be within reach of an Early School Leaver (European Parliament, 2011).

A higher level of education can lead to a series of positive outcomes for both the individual and society related to employment, higher salaries, better health, less crime, higher social cohesion, lower public and social costs and higher productivity and growth (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). Young people with higher levels of educational qualifications are more

likely to access high quality employment and gain higher pay levels in the immediate period after school, and these advantages persist in to adult life (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Highly educated adults have broader social advantages, including improved health status (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). Education has a documented effect on health, nutrition, economic development and on environmental protection (UNESCO, 2014). In many quarters, education is believed to offer a route whereby people can escape from disadvantaged family backgrounds and climb the social ladder (Drudy, 2009). More educated people tend to live longer, tend to engage in more civic activities and tend to feel happier (OECD, 2013).

Conversely, inadequate education as a result of Early School Leaving has high costs for the individual, for society and for the economy (Psacharopoulos, 2007; Belfield, 2008; Nevala et al., 2011). As a consequence of leaving education early, young people may be faced with reduced opportunities in the labour market and an increased likelihood of unemployment and socioeconomic disadvantage and they may be less inclined to participate in political, social and cultural spheres of life. Furthermore, these negative consequences have an impact on the next generation and may perpetuate the occurrence of Early School Leaving (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). Young people with only lower second level education or less, are more likely to be dependent on social benefits and have a higher risk of social exclusion. It affects their lifetime earnings, well-being and health (European Commission, 2017). To extrapolate this to a societal and economic level, the European Commission (2009) has stated that reducing the number of Early School Leavers from upper second level education and training is one of the European Union's main targets in the field of education. A headline target has been set to reduce the rate of Early School Leaving to below a rate of 10% across all European member states by 2020. This target was set as it is considered a crucial requirement in order to enhance economic growth and social cohesion (European Commission, 2009). Figures show that Ireland has reduced its rate of Early School Leaving from 9.7% in 2012 to 6.9% in 2015, compared to a European average of 11% in 2015, reduced from 12.9% in 2012 (European Commission, 2016).

Reducing Early School Leaving is therefore, considered important in terms of improving outcomes for both the individual and society (Borg et al., 2015). As outlined, the likelihood of being unemployed decreases with the educational level achieved (Przybylski, 2014). Figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2017) indicate a link between educational attainment and unemployment. The unemployed rate for people who had attained a primary education at most was 34.6%. This compares to an unemployment rate of 6.2% for those with a third level degree or higher. As the rate of educational attainment increases, the rate of unemployment decreases (CSO, 2017). For some researchers, therefore, Early School Leaving is a step on the pathway towards wider social exclusion (Bäckman and Nilsson, 2016; Jahnukainen and Järvinen, 2005; Wilkins and Huckabee, 2014).

Early School Leaving became a national policy priority and rose to the top of the social policy agenda in Ireland in the 1990s, when Early School Leaving came to be seen as the principal indicator of educational and other disadvantages (Boldt et al., 1998; Rourke, 1999; Stokes, 2003). However, in spite of a greater understanding of the impact of Early School Leaving and initiatives focused on reducing levels of Early School Leaving at national and European levels, (for example, ET 2020, the *European Strategic Framework for Education and Training 2020*; see European Council, 2009), in 2015, approximately 40 million young people, or 15% of the youth population across OECD countries, were not in education or training (OECD, 2016). Since the European headline target for Early School Leaving has been set, some European countries including Ireland have already attained this target of an Early School Leaving rate of below 10% by 2020. These countries are being encouraged to continue to work on reducing their rates of Early School Leaving even further.

1.2 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

There has been extensive research on the factors that lead to Early School Leaving and most research indicates that it is never a single factor but a combination of factors (Dowrick and Crespo, 2005). Early School Leaving is a

multi-faceted and complex problem caused by a cumulative process of disengagement that occurs over time (Lyche, 2010; European Commission, 2013), where disengagement is defined as a

...higher order factor composed of correlated subfactors measuring different aspects of the process of detaching from school, disconnecting from its norms and expectations, reducing effort and involvement at school and withdrawing from a commitment to school and to school completion (Balfanz et al. 2007).

The actual event of Early School Leaving is therefore, the culmination of a much longer process of leaving school that began long before the date that a student actually discontinues attendance (Doll, 2013). Leaving school represents the final stage of this disengagement (Finn 1989; Newmann et al., 1992; Rumberger and Lim, 2008; Lamb et al., 2004; Bradshaw et al., 2008) and warning signs may occur as early as primary school, thus granting ample time for intervention (Rumberger and Thomas, 2000; McGarr, 2010).

Early School Leaving is therefore, considered a complicated process affected by the many variables that shape a young person's trajectory through school and beyond (Stokes, 2003). Reasons for Early School Leaving are highly individual. However, as a social phenomena, Early School Leaving follows certain patterns (European Parliament, 2011). Authors have therefore, been able to investigate the risk factors associated with Early School Leaving.

Risk is typically defined as particular conditions (i.e. risk factors) that increase the likelihood that an individual will experience certain adverse consequences, and rather than being viewed as a property of children themselves, risk is more contemporarily thought to exist in interactions among the multiple systems surrounding children (Finn and Rock, 1997; Pianta and Walsh, 1996, 1998). Defining risk in this manner and considering the multiple systems that surround children, draws on Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986, 1994) Ecological Systems Theory. Ecological models encompass an evolving body of theory and research concerned with the processes and conditions that govern the lifelong course of human development in the actual environments in which humans beings live

(Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986, 1994) theory defines complex layers of environment, each having an effect on a child's development. It is the interaction of the structures *within* a layer and the interactions of structures *between* layers that is key to this theory.

The seminal work of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986, 1994) Ecological Systems Theory details children and adolescents' development within a set of interrelated, interacting environmental systems (for example, home, school, community). This theory has become a commonly used lens through which to view and explore students and their development over time (see Tudge and Hogan, 2005). Bronfenbrenner (1994) argues that in order to understand human development, one must consider the entire ecological system in which growth occurs. According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), this system is composed of five socially organised subsystems that help support and guide human growth. They are:

1. The Microsystem – the microsystem is the smallest and most immediate system in which the child lives. It is a pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social and symbolic features that invite, permit or inhibit interaction with and activity in, the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This is the layer closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact. The microsystem encompasses the relationships and interactions a child has with his/her immediate surroundings (Berk, 2000). Structures in the microsystem include family, school, neighbourhood, peer group or childcare environments. At this level, relationships have impact in two directions - both away from the child and toward the child. Interactions within the microsystem typically involve personal relationships with family members, classmates, teachers and caregivers, in which influences go back and forth. For example, a child's parents may affect his/her beliefs and behaviour; however, the child also affects the behaviour and beliefs of the parent. Bronfenbrenner (1994) calls these bi-directional influences, and he

shows how they occur among all levels of environment. At the microsystem level, bi-directional influences are strongest and have the greatest impact on the child.

2. The Mesosystem – the mesosystem encompasses the *interaction* of the different microsystems which the developing child finds him/herself in. It is, in essence, a system of microsystems and as such, involves linkages *between* home and school, *between* peer group and family, or *between* family and church. The mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place *between* two or more settings containing the developing person, for example, the relations *between* home and school. In other words, the mesosystem is a system of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).
3. The Exosystem – the exosystem pertains to the linkages and processes that may exist between two or more settings, at least one of which may *not* contain the developing child but in which events occur that affects him/her indirectly nonetheless. Other people and places which the child may not directly interact with but may still have an effect on the child, comprise the exosystem. For example, for a child the relationship between the home and the parent's workplace; for a parent, the relation between the school and the neighbourhood peer group. Research has focused on three exosystems that are likely to affect the development of children and youth i.e. the parents' workplaces (Eckenrode and Gore, 1990), family social networks (Cochran et al., 1990) and neighbourhood-community contexts (Pence, 1988).
4. The Macrosystem – the macrosystem is the largest and most distant collection of people and places to the child that still exercises significant influence on the child. The macrosystem consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture or subculture, with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, lifestyles, opportunity structures, hazards and life course options embedded in each of the broader systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The macrosystem can be considered as the societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

5. The Chronosystem – the chronosystem is considered to extend the environment in to a third dimension. Traditionally in the study of human development, the passage of time was treated as synonymous with chronological age. Since the early 1970s, an increasing number of theorists have employed designs in which time appears not merely as an attribute of the growing human being, but also as a property of the surrounding not only over the life course, but across historical time (Baltes and Schaie, 1973; Clausen, 1986; Elder, 1974; Elder et al., 1993). A chronosystem, therefore, encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person, but also of the environment in which that person lives, for example, changes over the life course in family structure, socioeconomic status, employment, place of residence, or the degree of hecticness and ability in everyday life (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986, 1994) Ecological Systems Theory will be used in this report as a conceptual and theoretical framework to help structure and explain the relationship between the multifarious, intertwined predictive risk factors that emerge from the literature on Early School Leaving.

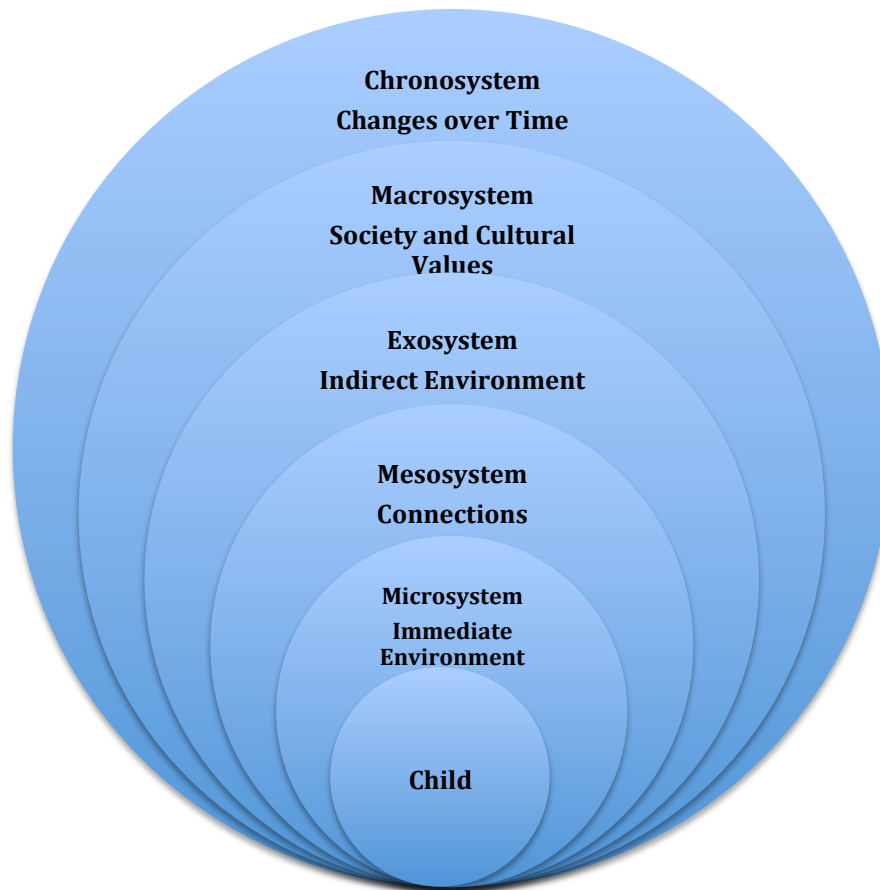


Figure 1: Model of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986, 1994) Ecological Systems Theory

1.2.1 Congruence Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Ecological System Theory and its influence on the understanding of the risk factors pertaining to Early School Leaving, should be considered in light of more recent work on the construct of congruence (Glueck and Reschly, 2014). Numerous theorists have cited congruence between environments, (most specifically that of the home and school environments), as an integral variable in facilitating student success (see Christensen, 2004; Christensen and Anderson, 2002; Finn and Rock, 1997; Reschly and Christenson, 2009). The construct of congruence is not a new one, but rather is central to many different areas of theoretical literature and empirical research. Specifically considering the concept of congruence as it relates to school-family relationships and collaboration, Clarke et al. (2010) define 'congruence' as the continuity or common approach among home and school contexts.

However, although much of the educational research rooted in Ecological Systems Theory has focused on protective factors embedded within *either* the home *or* school environments (see Bates, 2005; Fan and Chen, 2001; Ginsburg-Block, Manz, and McWayne, 2010; Guli, 2005; Reynolds and Clements, 2005; Valdez, Carlson and Zanger, 2005), recent literature suggests that this approach is flawed; that is, in lieu of simply aiming to improve family involvement in students' education, researchers are increasingly highlighting the need for development of collaborative school-family partnerships, which are believed to be essential to promoting positive outcomes for students (see Bempechat, 1998; Christenson and Reschly, 2010; Christenson and Sheridan, 2001; Patrikakou, et al., 2005; Pianta and Walsh, 1996).

Considering the importance placed in the literature in relation to congruence between these systems, these systems should therefore be considered alongside Downes' (2013) Theory of Diametric and Concentric relations. Downes' (2013) theory outlines issues of systemic blockage that can occur depending on which type of space and relationships exist within an environment such as a school.

1.2.2 Downes' (2013) Theory of Diametric and Concentric Relations

Downes (2013) advances Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Theory of Ecological Systems by arguing that key problems of Early School Leaving can be interpreted as system level blockages in communication, including blockage in communication of children's voices. He expands upon the structural anthropology of Levi-Strauss' cross-cultural examination of Systems of Relation (Levi Strauss, 1962, 1963; Downes, 2009, 2012). According to Downes (2013), the pervasive relational structure which currently exists in schools is a diametric one (see Figure 2).

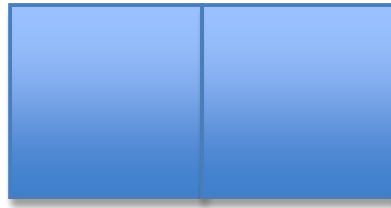


Figure 2: Diametric Dualism – Diametrically opposed relationships and spaces, perpetuating alienation

Presented in this way, Downes (2013) considers diametric spaces as oppositional spaces, characterised by authoritarian teaching; utilising structures of expulsion; maintaining passive students without power and voice in the decision-making of the school; and displaying an absence of the view of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the young person/child. Diametric spaces exemplify blocked systems, where the voice of the child is not heard (Downes, 2013).

In contrast, Downes (2013) considers concentric relational spaces (see Figure 3) as spaces which forge connections.

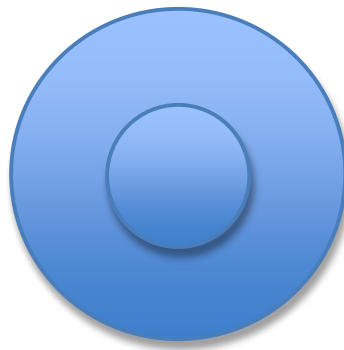


Figure 3: Concentric Dualism – Concentric relationships and spaces perpetuating connections

Such spaces are characterised by relational teaching where teachers engage in professional development and utilise conflict resolution and diversity skills; where alternative spaces are available on the school site to support diverse needs; where student councils with decision-making powers are set up, that provide feedback and voice for all students and processes for the student voice at a system level (such as surveys).

Organising spaces and environments such as a school in either a diametric or a concentric manner therefore, has implications for relationships within that environment.

Moving this further, Downes (2013) therefore, considers that alienating experiences and diametric relationships and spaces are risk factors for Early School Leaving. Alternatively, concentric relationships and spaces provide opportunities to listen to students' experiences and may help to ameliorate such risks. Downes (2013) advocates therefore, for a collapse from diametric to concentric relationships and spaces because such diametric systemic structural patterns are seen by Downes (2013) to potentially exacerbate the risk factors of Early School Leaving.

The dynamic interplay between diametric and concentric spaces of relation is developed by Downes (2013) as a guiding framework for change to constructs such as the school environment, in order to help prevent Early School Leaving at a systemic level of the school. In concentric spaces, there are connections between students themselves and between teachers and students (Downes, 2009). Such concentric states of relation, challenge traditional hierarchical relations between student and teacher, as hierarchy rest on a diametric mode of assumed separation (Downes, 2012). Downes (2012) refers to several student centred studies where second level students identified a range of attitudinal precursors for leaving school early (see Cefai and Cooper, 2010; Downes, 2004; Magri, 2009). This is in keeping with Freeney and O'Connell's (2012) call for further research in to the attitudes of Early School Leavers, which are not always sought in research on Early School Leaving.

It is the dynamics across each of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986, 1994) aforementioned systems, and the interplay that occurs between them, that has a cumulative effect on non-completion and is the lens through which the risk factors identified below should be viewed. In this sense, risk is conceptualised from an Ecological Systems Theory perspective.

1.3 Predictive Risk Factors for Early School Leaving

Research on Early School Leavers has been criticised for using an epidemiological approach, seeing Early School Leaving as a disease to be cured and advocating morbid stereotypes of the Early School Leaver (see Boldt, 1994, 1997; Fleming and Kenny, 1998; Stokes, 1999a, 1999b; Mayock, 2000). It must therefore, be recognised that Early School Leavers are a heterogeneous rather than a homogenous group (Stokes, 2003). Notwithstanding these observations, patterns have been established in the literature and it is evident that the greater the number of risks experienced by a student, the greater the risk of Early School Leaving (McGarr, 2010).

Many theoretical patterns of Early School Leaving exist. Predictive causes of Early School Leaving are manifold with authors speaking about the school's climate, aggressive behaviour, depression, lack of attention, problem-solving in the family and family functioning (Blaya, 2010; Douat, 2011). For Gilles et al. (2012), the causes of Early School Leaving break down into two categories and four sub-categories:

- Factors which are internal to the school system: this includes organisation, structure and the interactions between teachers and students;
- External factors, for example family and social factors and factors relating to the student themselves.

Much of the international literature on Early School Leaving has been informed by a focus on individual-level risk factors or the cultural influences on school completion. This focus may result in a deficit perspective of Early School Leavers, potentially blaming young people and their families for non-completion. The emergence of longitudinal studies has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of Early School Leaving, with the interaction of individual, family and school factors, (in keeping with Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986, 1994), found to shape a gradual process of disengagement from school (Byrne and Smyth, 2010).

Whilst some authors emphasise elements linked with the student, (behaviour, psychology, achievement), others insist on elements linked with school (teaching practices, relationships, school's atmosphere); other elements also feature such as parents. However, the conclusion drawn is that almost 55% of the explained variance comes from variables which are close to the student (Potvin and Pinard, 2012). These variables belong to four systems: the student him/herself, the class (the teacher), the school and the parents (Potvin and Pinard, 2012).

Referring to these systems, research tends to choose different categories for classifying Early School Leaving risks (see Gambetta, 1987; O'Shea and Williams, 2001; Fleming and Murphy, 2000; Stokes, 2003; Byrne and Smyth, 2010; Marchesi, 2003; Rumberger and Lim, 2008; Feyfant, 2011a, 2011b; Thibert, 2013; Lyche, 2010; Markussen, 2010). However, researchers largely agree on two broad categories: individual (to include characteristics of the student), and institutional (to include characteristics of the student's school and communities) (see for example Markussen, 2010; Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

Dale (2010) summarises current knowledge of the factors implicated in the generation of Early School Leaving:

Early School Leaving always occurs in particular contexts that produce and shape it in specific ways. It has both individual and institutional determinants. It results from interaction between family and social background, and school processes and experiences. It is the culmination of what is usually a long process that often begins before a young person enters school (Dale, 2010: 5).

Thus, for the purposes of this report, risk factors will be classified into two categories: *Individual and Social factors* and *School and Systemic factors*. These two categories will be further subdivided as outlined below in Figure 4:

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
			Status and Structure
			Practices
			Resources
School and Systemic Factors	School Structure		
	School Practices		

Figure 4: Summary of Early School Leaving Predictive Risk Factors – *Individual and Social Factors & School and Systemic Factors*

Each subcategory of either *Individual and Social Factors* or *School and Systemic Factors* will be summarised at the end of each section.

As outlined, the causes for Early School Leaving are complex and interrelated. In keeping with Dale (2010), the key then, is the *interactive* nature of the relationship between determinants. Early School Leaving does not simply arise because of an individual's psychological make up, their experiences at school or family background. Rather it is the *interaction* of these factors, at particular times in particular contexts (Dale, 2010).

For this reason, De Witte et al. (2013) argue against exploring the predictors of Early School Leaving separately from one another, on the grounds that:

...they are inextricably bound up with each other. It makes no sense to view these characteristics isolated from each other, as they interact in countless ways. Neither student attributes, nor family or school characteristics can be seen apart from society at large.

Attempting to disentangle their effects from each other by means of ever more sophisticated statistical modelling, may thus not only prove to be a tremendous challenge, perhaps it is not even always worth the effort (2013: 18).

Although the literature on Early School Leaving and Early School Leaving-like phenomena taken together is substantial, a number of reviews synthesise the Europe-focused literatures, (though typically in combination with literature from elsewhere), and reach broadly similar conclusions (see Bradley and Lenton, 2007; Dale, 2010; De Witte et al., 2013; Lyche, 2010). Based in the U.S., Rumberger and Lim (2008) present a detailed meta-analysis which considers twenty five years of research across the globe on the topic of predictive risk factors of Early School Leaving. These extensive larger studies are usefully complemented by briefer, but still substantial, literature reviews in journal papers (see Cederberg and Hartsmar, 2013; Frostad et al., 2015; Traag and van der Velden, 2011).

1.4 Individual and Social Factors

It is considered that student and family characteristics can explain approximately 80% of the variability in student achievement and the remaining 20% of the variability in student outcomes can be attributed to the characteristics of the schools that students attend (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). The discussion of Individual and Social Risk factors will be structured using Tinto's (1987) model of institutional departure. Rumberger and Lim (2008) use Tinto's (1987) model to order Individual and Social factors into four domains: Educational Performance, Behaviours, Attitudes and Social Background (Figure 5) (see Tinto, 1987; Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance
	Behaviour
	Attitudes
	Social Background

Figure 5: *Individual and Social Factors* of Early School Leaving (Tinto, 1987; Rumberger and Lim, 2008)

1.4.1 Educational Performance

Rumberger and Lim (2008) order Educational Performance into Academic Achievement, Persistence and Attainment. This structure will be used to organise the discussion below.

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement
		Persistence
		Attainment

Figure 6: Elements of *Educational Performance* (Rumberger and Lim, 2008)

Students' experiences of schooling are a significant predictor of Early School Leaving (Eivers et al., 2000). Some research has indicated that variables relating to school experience are the best screening predictors for potential Early School Leaving, and that other variables such as family, behaviour and personality, although significant, add little to the predictive capacity of school experiences (Janoz et. al, 1997).

1.4.1.1 Academic Achievement

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
Status and Structure			
Practices			
Resources			
School and Systemic Factors	Structure		
	Practices		

Figure 7: Positioning of *Academic Achievement* within *Individual and Social Factors*

Educational performance is seen as the highest predictor for non-completion by most of the research (Lyche, 2010; Rumberger and Lim, 2008; Traag and van der Velden, 2008; Markussen, 2010; European Parliament, 2011; European Commission, 2015; Marks and Fleming, 1999; Croll, 2009).

Research shows a strong link between low academic ability and Early School Leaving (see Beekhoven and Dekkers, 2005; Byrne and Smyth, 2010; Marks, 2007). Rumberger (1995) identified grade retention as the single most powerful school-related predictor of Early School Leaving. Those who are retained at a grade level often find that they are older than their classmates, a factor that has been associated with Early School Leaving in an Irish context (Granville, 1982). These difficulties get greater over time; whereas a student may fall only slightly behind in the early years of schooling, as time goes by, they experience

more difficulty and less success in a school context, weakening their motivation to stay in school (Barrington and Hendricks, 1989; Natriello, 1982). Grade retention will be returned to later in this report.

Academic achievement is identified as having a significant effect on the odds of Early School Leaving or upper second level school completion, and grades are found to be a more certain predictor than test scores (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Research show that academic performance in both middle and elementary school can often predict whether students will leave school early or graduate high school (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). (In the U.S., elementary school is kindergarten through to 5th grade (ages 5-10); middle school is grades 6-8 (ages 11-13), and high school is grades 9-12 (ages 14-18)). Whilst grades at the end of lower second level are a solid predictor of Early School Leaving, grades from primary school have the absolute highest significance for completion (Byrhagen et al., 2006; Markussen et al., 2008; Markussen, 2010; Jimerson et al., 2002; Croll, 2009).

Lyche (2010) considers that the correlation between educational performance and Early School Leaving from upper second level shows two processes at work. Firstly, good grades are a measure of solid competencies and students with good grades are better prepared for upper second level education. Secondly, grades are strongly influenced by social background, gender, minority language, parents' education and connection to labour market and cultural capital. Thus, the student's social background has an indirect effect on school completion through educational performance (Markussen, 2010). Therefore, those who experience difficulty in meeting the academic demands of school, who get low grades and who are retained at a grade level are those most likely to become Early School Leavers (Alexander et al., 1997; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger and Lim, 2008; Wehlage and Rutter, 1986).

A poor general level of attainment acts as a warning in many European countries, though the criteria for this being used as a warning signal varies depending on individual school level policies and practices. In some countries, concern is raised if a student receives poor grades in a number of different

subjects. In Slovenia, three poor grades may act as a warning signal for teachers. In Sweden, if schools notice that a student falls behind in one or more subjects, the parents/guardians are notified. In Estonia, a sudden decline in marks/grades is regarded as an early warning signal and schools are obliged to implement support systems for students who have received non-satisfactory marks/grades in order to help them achieve the prescribed learning outcomes. It is however, more common that poor marks in some specific subjects, for example, in Croatia, or national tests are used as warning signals, for example, Latvia. Marks/grades in mother tongue and mathematics are closely monitored (European Commission, 2012). Ever decreasing achievement is a significant factor that also requires attention (Freeney and O'Connell, 2012). In Croatia, one of the most commonly reported reasons for early leaving is low educational achievement (Feric et al., 2010). Similarly, in France, student achievement has been reported as one of the most predictive factors of Early School Leaving, after controlling for the effects of socioeconomic background and grade retention (Afsa, 2013).

Many states and cities in the U.S. have a longer track record in operating Early Warning Systems (EWS) than most of the European countries. Many of their most successful Early Warning Systems are based on the results of longitudinal studies following entire cohorts of students entering specific years and then following their performance, attendance and Early School Leaving levels until the end of high school to determine the main risk factors and early warning signals associated with Early School Leaving (European Commission, 2012). Philadelphia has a long history of carrying out research on why students leave education early. A longitudinal study was set up in 1996 to follow 14,000 students entering the middle school for six years. On the basis of this data, the researchers looked for any signals, such as a poor course grade, a low test score, attendance, behaviour marks, special education status and determined signals that give students at least a 75% probability of leaving school before finishing high school (equivalent to upper second level education). It was found that a 6th grader with even one of the following four signals had at least a 75% chance of leaving school before completing high school: final grade of F in mathematics; final grade of F in English; attendance below 80% for the year

and final 'unsatisfactory' behaviour mark in at least one class. Students with more than one signal had an even higher probability of leaving school within six years. Similar indicators were also developed for high school students and the first year of high school was found to be particularly indicative of the future chances of leaving school early. Many students who were doing moderately well in junior high school started to show distress signals at this stage, a point that will be returned to below in terms of the affect of difficult transitions. Students who earned fewer than two credits or attended school less than 70% of the time had at least a 75% chance of leaving school early (see Curran Neild et. al. 2007).

From an Irish perspective, studies continue to show that previous academic achievement is strongly related to Early School Leaving. Students who have lower reading and mathematics levels on entry to second level education are more likely to leave school in the years that follow (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Students who struggle or spend little time on homework are those most likely to leave school early (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Byrne and Smyth's (2010) study also showed that Early School Leaving is not only related to absolute levels of academic achievement but to how such academic difficulties are addressed by the school. Not surprisingly, students achieving high academic grades are less likely to leave school early (Jimerson et al., 2000; Neisser et al., 1996). However, Jimerson et al. (2000) also point out that poor grades at school may be reasonably interpreted as the early stage of Early School Leaving rather than as a root cause.

Junior Cycle processes, especially second year experiences, are key influences on later outcomes. Smyth et al. (2011) shows that those who had difficulty coping with schoolwork in second year achieved lower Leaving Certificate grades, all else being equal. In addition, the use of streaming, whereby students were allocated to 'higher' or 'lower' ability classes for all of their Junior Cycle subjects, resulted in significantly lower Leaving Certificate grades for students in lower stream classes, without any corresponding achievement gain for those in higher stream classes. Findings show that Junior and Leaving Certificate exam grades are highly correlated, so many students who achieve lower grades

in the Junior Certificate exam do not regain ground when they reach Senior cycle. Students who spend more time on homework and study in sixth year achieve higher grades. However, those who spend considerable amounts of time on homework, (over four or five hours), do not achieve an advantage over those spending moderate amounts of time on homework (Smyth et. al., 2011). Streaming will be returned to later in the discussion.

A wide range of Special Educational Needs (SEN) is cited in the literature as being associated with, and possibly causal in, Early School Leaving. Dale (2010) considers Early School Leavers as coming from vulnerable groups such as those with Special Educational Needs. Learning difficulties such as Asperger's Syndrome are thought to be directly causal, unless identified and adequately addressed early in the child's life (Stokes, 2003). Having a learning difficulty highly affects the rate of Early School Leaving (Markussen, 2010; Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

1.4.1.2 Persistence

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
Status and Structure			
Practices			
Resources			
School and Systemic Factors	Structure		
	Practices		

Figure 8: Positioning of *Persistence* within *Individual and Social Factors*

Both leaving school early and transferring schools, often referred to as student mobility, is considered to be a form of persistence, with student mobility the less severe form of non-persistence (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Persistence is considered as part of a continuum i.e. students may quit temporarily or permanently, transfer schools voluntarily or involuntarily. Student mobility, (the act of transferring schools), during middle and high school increases the chances of Early School Leaving and decreases the chances of graduation (Rumberger and Lim, 2008; Lyche, 2010). Often student mobility is associated with residential mobility. Even studies that control for a host of preexisting factors, such as student achievement, conclude that there is at least some causal association between mobility and educational performance (Pribesh and Downey, 1999).

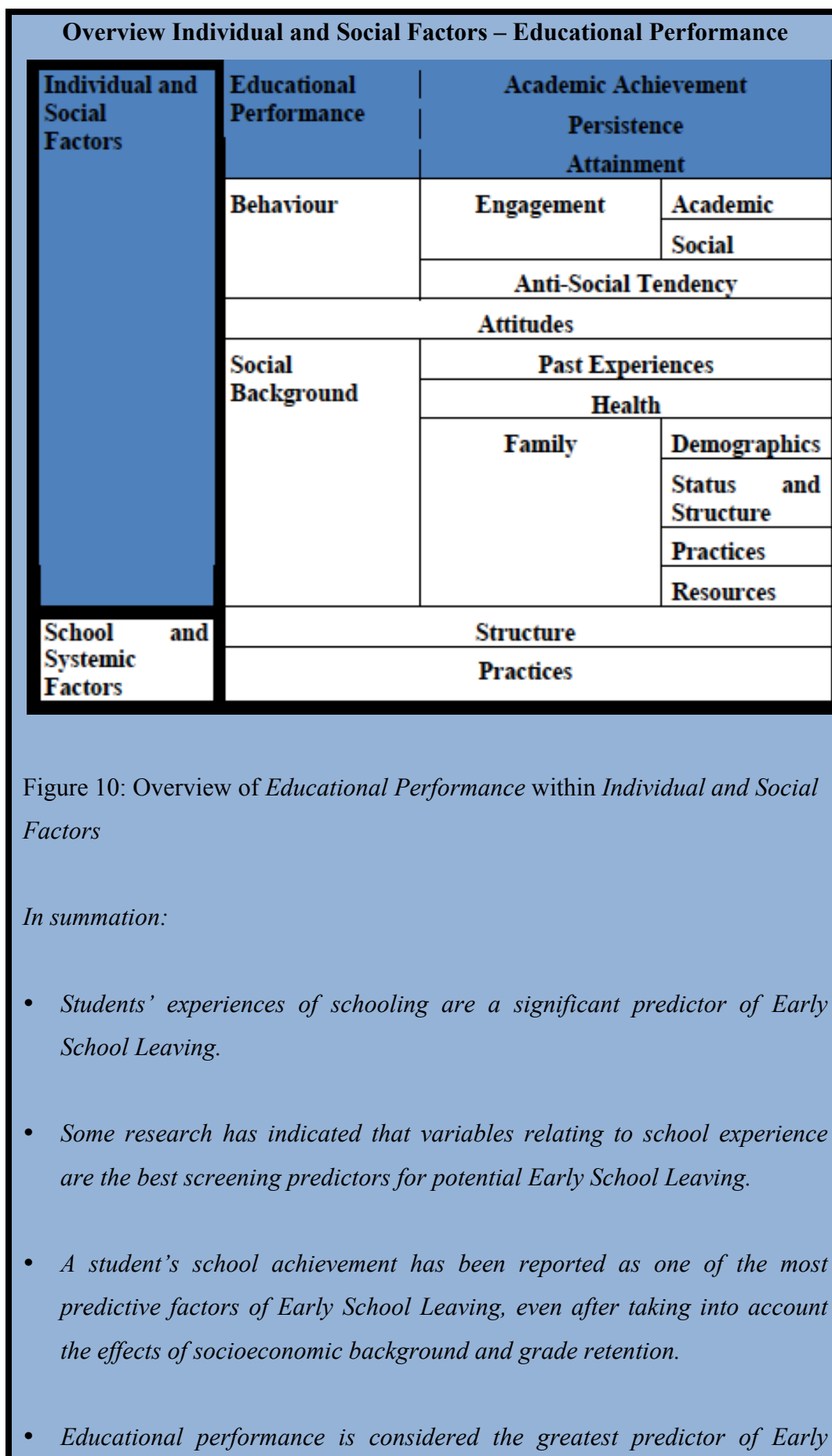
1.4.1.3 Attainment

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
Status and Structure			
Practices			
Resources			
School and Systemic Factors	Structure		
	Practices		

Figure 9: Positioning of *Attainment* within *Individual and Social Factors*

Attainment is measured through educational promotion from one grade to another and through graduation (Rumberger and Lim, 2008; Lyche, 2010). The literature reviewed by Rumberger and Lim (2008) finds that retention has a negative impact on Early School Leaving. This supports the view exposed by the 2007 OECD report on equity in education (Field et al., 2007), which finds that retention is a consistent predictor of whether students graduate. Most studies have examined the effect of retention in elementary school or the combined effects of retention in elementary and middle school. Thirty-seven of the 50 of those analyses found that retention in elementary and/or middle school increased the odds of leaving school early. Only two analyses examined the effects of high school retention on Early School Leaving and neither found any significant effects (Alexander, Entwisle, and Kabbani, 2001; Sweeten, 2006). It should be noted that the fact that retention is a significant predictor of leaving school early does not establish a casual relationship (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). In the UK, the single biggest predictive factor of school retention after 16 years of age is the GCSE exams (Payne, 2001; Croll, 2009).

Related to retention is the concept of over-age. Students who are one or two years older than their classmates are identified as over-age. Most of the studies in Rumberger and Lim's (2008) meta-analysis find that older students are more likely to leave school early than younger students. This point will be returned to later in this report.



School Leaving in most of the research.

- *Research shows a strong link between low academic ability and Early School Leaving.*
- *Test scores and grades at second level are strongly related to Early School Leaving, where grades are found to be a more certain predictor than test scores. Whilst grades at the end of lower second level schooling are a solid predictor of Early School Leaving, grades from primary school have the absolute highest significance for school completion.*
- *Systems differ in terms of how they use grades as early warning signals of Early School Leaving, ranging from a focus on ever decreasing achievement, to a sudden decline in grades, to poor grades in one or more, or specific subjects.*
- *Lower reading and mathematic scores on entry to post primary school are associated with greater risk of Early School Leaving.*
- *Students who struggle with, or spend little time on homework are most likely to leave school early.*
- *There is a strong correlation between having Special Educational Needs and Early School Leaving, where having a learning difficulty highly increases rates of Early School Leaving.*
- *Student mobility, either school and/or home, during primary and lower second level increases the risk of Early School Leaving. Even studies that control for at list of preexisting factors, such as student achievement, conclude that there is at least some causal association between mobility and educational performance.*
- *Retention, (being held back one or more grades), in primary or second level, is a significant predictor of Early School Leaving, where retention at*

primary level is seen as the single most powerful predictor of Early School Leaving.

- *Related to retention is the concept of over-age, where students who are retained at a grade are one or two years older than their classmates. Studies find that older students are more likely to leave school early than younger students.*

In terms of Individual and Social factors – Educational Performance, those who experience difficulties in meeting the academic demands of school, who get low grades and who are retained at a grade level, are those most likely to leave school early.

1.4.2 Behaviour

A wide range of behaviours in the theoretical and empirical research literature has been linked to whether students leave school early or graduate from school. Behavioural factors leading to Early School Leaving can be divided into two main categories: Engagement and Anti-Social Tendency (Lyche, 2010). Monitoring behaviour is part of many national and sub-national Early Warning Systems (European Commission, 2013).

Individual and Social Factors	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	

Figure 11: Elements of *Behaviour* (Rumberger and Lim, 2008; Lyche, 2010)

1.4.2.1 Engagement

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
			Status and Structure
			Practices
			Resources
School and Systemic Factors	Structure		
	Practices		

Figure 12: Positioning of *Engagement* within *Individual and Social Factors*

In much of the literature, student engagement is one of the most important behavioural precursors to Early School Leaving, though it must be acknowledged that student engagement is a difficult factor to measure (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). A student's level of school engagement comprises both academic and social integration with the school (You and Sharkey, 2009).

When students are fully engaged in learning they tend to achieve better academic outcomes (Finn and Rock, 1997) and students who display stable and higher levels of school engagement over the course of their careers are less likely to leave school early (Janosz et al., 2008; Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Academic performance is a key predictor of retention in schools as seen above and some students who have difficulties in school may also develop behavioural problems which can lead to detentions, truancy, suspensions and expulsions (Walker et al., 1998). Lack of attendance marks a general

disengagement from school, ultimately leading to Early School Leaving (Jimerson et al., 2000).

The most common specific indicator in Rumberger and Lim's (2008) study was absenteeism, where they found that students with higher absenteeism were more likely to leave school early and less likely to graduate. A high level of absenteeism in lower second level school is very often followed by Early School Leaving in upper second level school (Hernes, 2010; Balfanz et al., 2007; MacIver and MacIver, 2009). Absenteeism and misbehaviour are predictive of Early School Leaving, from as early as elementary school (Alexander et al., 1997; Barrington and Hendricks, 1989).

Suspension rates are predictive of Early School Leaving (Lee et al., 2011). Early School Leavers were significantly more likely than those who remained in school to report having been suspended or expelled (Eivers et al., 2000; Janosz et al., 1997; Schwartz, 1995). Almost one fifth of the Early School Leavers in Eivers et al., (2000) Irish study had been suspended in primary school, while half reported having been suspended in post primary school.

Irish research also indicates that absenteeism is a major predictor of Early School Leaving (Granville, 1982; Greaney and Kellaghan, 1984). Irish research continues to indicate that school leaving tends to be preceded by absenteeism and truancy (Smyth, 1999; McCoy et al., 2007; Darmody et al., 2008). Students with poor attendance records in their Junior Cycle year are over twice as likely as those with an average or good attendance to leave school after the end of the year (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Lack of motivation is cited in most research as a reason for Early School Leaving (Markussen, 2010; Rumberger and Lim, 2008; Traag and van der Velden, 2008).

Another specific indicator of engagement is participation in extracurricular activities. This indicator of engagement showed a less consistent relationship with Early School Leaving behaviour, where only 14 of 26 analyses found that participation in extracurricular activities reduced the likelihood of leaving school early or increased the odds of graduating. Participation in sports,

especially among males, shows more consistent effects than participation in other extracurricular activities or participation in extracurricular activities more generally (McNeal, 1995; Pittman, 1991; Yin and Moore, 2004).

1.4.2.2 Anti-Social Tendency

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
			Status and Structure
			Practices
			Resources
School and Systemic Factors	Structure		
	Practices		

Figure 13: Positioning of *Anti-Social Tendency* within *Individual and Social Factors*

Whilst a discussion of anti-social tendency is beyond the bounds of this report, it is the work of D.W. Winnicott, the pioneering British child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst whose theoretical framework for anti-social tendency will underpin discussions in this section. In terms of risk-taking, Winnicott (1967, 1968) argues that adolescents push the necessary boundaries for separation (from parents and what he calls the ‘big Others’). This, he considers, is part of the adolescent process and also part of the reason why adolescents are considered ‘difficult.’ He calls this the ‘anti-social tendency’ which he says is actually entirely normal, as it is an expression of hope and ultimately should be

considered an effort to construct a vital way of communication (see Winnicott, 1967, 1968).

The research literature finds that engaging in any behaviour such as misbehaving in school, anti-social tendencies outside of school, drug and alcohol use and sexual activity and teen childbearing, increases the risk of leaving school early (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Most of the existing research has examined the effects of one or two specific indicators of anti-social tendencies on leaving school early. Two exceptions are found in recent, related studies that developed general constructs of anti-social tendencies based on data from a longitudinal study of 808 fifth grade students from the Seattle (Washington) Public Schools. One construct was developed from three indicators: drug use, violent behaviour and non-violent behaviour (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). The other construct was developed from four indicators: school problems, anti-social tendencies, drug use and sexual activity (Newcomb et al., 2002). Controlling for a host of other predictors, including prior academic achievement and family background, both studies found that anti-social tendencies at age 14 had a significant and direct effect on Early School Leaving by age 16, and high school failure (Early School Leaving and months of missed school) in grade 12 (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). The most common indicator of anti-social tendency is school misbehaviour. Misbehaviour was significantly associated with higher Early School Leaving and lower graduation rates; where misbehaviour in middle school was significantly associated with higher Early School Leaving and lower graduation rates in high school. One analysis that focused on the elementary school level found that misbehaviour in elementary school increased the odds of leaving school early (Ou, Mersky, Reynolds, and Kohler, 2007).

The research literature also reports on anti-social tendencies or misbehaviour outside of school. Youth with anti-social tendencies were more likely to leave school early than youth without such tendencies. Another indicator of anti-social tendencies that has been studied in the research literature is drug and alcohol use. Drug or alcohol use during high school was associated with higher Early School Leaving rates. Two studies found that tobacco use during middle

school had a direct effect on the odds of leaving school early, while drug (marijuana) use did not (Ellickson, Bui, Bell and McGuigan, 1998; Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). Another study found that both marijuana and tobacco use had direct effects on leaving school early, but marijuana use had the stronger effect (Bray, Zarkin, Ringwalt and Qi, 2000).

A final indicator of anti-social behaviour that has been studied in the research literature is teen parenting and childbearing. Teenage parenting and childbearing increased the odds of Early School Leaving or reduced the odds of graduating. In studies that compared males and females, teenage parenting had more serious consequences for females than for males (Fernandez, Paulsen, and Hirano-Nakanishi, 1989). Peers may influence students' social and academic behaviours, attitudes toward school, and access to resources (social capital) that may benefit their education (Ream, 2005a, 2005b; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). The most consistent finding is that having friends with anti-social tendencies, friends who engage in criminal behaviour, for instance (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Kaplan, Peck, and Kaplan, 1997), or friends who have left school early (Saiz and Zoido, 2005; Cairns et al., 1989; Carbonaro, 1998) increases the odds of leaving school early, with such associations appearing as early as the 7th grade.

Several studies found that only students who worked more than twenty hours a week were significantly more likely to leave school early (D'Amico, 1984; Goldschmidt and Wang, 1999; Perreira, Harris, and Lee, 2006; Warren and Lee, 2003; Warren and Cataldi, 2006). On the other hand, other studies found that students who worked fewer than 20 hours (D'Amico, 1984), or fewer than seven hours (McNeal, 1995), or more consistently throughout their high school careers (Zimmer-Gembeck and Mortimer, 2006), were less likely to leave school early, compared to students who worked more hours or did not work at all.

Overview Individual and Social Factors – Behaviour				
Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement		
		Persistence		
		Attainment		
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic	
			Social	
		Anti-Social Tendency		
	Attitudes			
	Social Background	Past Experiences		
		Health		
		Family	Demographics	
Status and Structure				
Practices				
Resources				
School and Systemic Factors	Structure			
	Practices			

Figure 14: Overview of *Behaviour* within *Individual and Social Factors*

In summation:

- *A wide range of behaviours in the theoretical and empirical research literature has been linked with either leaving school early or graduating from second level school.*
- *Behavioural factors leading to Early School Leaving can be divided in to two main categories: engagement and anti-social tendency, where anti-social tendency is considered from Winnicott's (1967, 1968) perspective.*
- *Student engagement is seen as one of the most important behavioural precursors of Early School Leaving.*
- *Student engagement encompasses both academic and social engagement.*

- *Students who display stable school engagement over the course of their time at school are less likely to leave school early.*
- *A high level of absenteeism in lower second level is very often followed by Early School Leaving at upper second level.*
- *The most common specific indicator of Early School Leaving is therefore considered to be absenteeism, where students with higher rates of absenteeism are most likely to leave school early.*
- *Early School Leaving tends to be preceded by absenteeism and truancy.*
- *Students with poor attendance records in 3rd Year are twice as likely as those with average or good attendance, to leave school at the end of the year.*
- *Suspension rates are predictive of Early School Leaving. Early School Leavers are significantly more likely than those who remain in school to report having been suspended or expelled.*
- *Research shows that displaying any anti-social tendencies, defined as misbehaving at school, anti-social tendencies outside of school, drug and alcohol use, sexual activity and teenage childbearing, increases the risk of Early School Leaving.*
- *The most common indicator of anti-social tendency is school misbehaviour, where misbehaviour has significant association with higher rates of early School Leaving.*
- *Anti-social tendency at the age of 14 has a significant and direct effect on Early School Leaving by the age of 16, even when controlling for a host of other preexisting factors such as prior academic achievement and family*

background.

- *Misbehaviour in middle school (lower second level school) is significantly associated with higher Early School Leaving rates.*
- *Misbehaviour at primary level increases the odds of Early School Leaving.*
- *Youth with anti-social tendencies are more likely to leave school early.*
- *Drug and alcohol use is associated with higher rates of Early School Leaving.*
- *Some studies show that tobacco use during second level had a direct effect on Early School Leaving, whilst drug (marijuana) did not. Other studies show both had a direct effect on rates of Early School Leaving, with marijuana use having a stronger impact on Early School Leaving.*
- *Teenage parenting and childbearing increase the risk of Early School Leaving, with more serious impact being felt by females.*
- *Working during schooling has an inconsistent effect according to the literature in the area. Some studies show that working more than 20 hours per week increased the rate of Early School Leaving; whilst other studies showed that working fewer than 20 hours or 7 hours meant that a student was less likely to leave school early.*

1.4.3 Attitudes

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
			Status and Structure
			Practices
			Resources
School and Systemic Factors	Structure		
	Practices		

Figure 15: Positioning of *Attitudes* within *Individual and Social Factors*

Students' beliefs, values, and attitudes are related to both their behaviours and to their performance in school. These psychological factors include motivation, values, goals, and a range of students' self-perceptions about themselves and their abilities (Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

Rumberger and Lim (2008) investigated whether a student's attitudes has a correlation to Early School Leaving by looking at goals and self-perception. Goals are measured by educational expectations, or how far the student expects to get in school. 33 out of 41 analyses studied found that higher educational expectations were associated with lower Early School Leaving rates at upper second level. However, at lower second level, the correlation was less obvious as only half of the studies covering this level found a similar relationship. Self-perception was measured through a different set of constructs such as self-concept, (a person's conception of his or herself for instance linked to reading),

or locus of control (the feeling of control over one's destiny). However, few studies have found a direct link between these constructs and Early School Leaving (Lyche, 2010).

Cairns et al. (1989) has highlighted that factors such as the young person's personality, (especially aggression levels), can shape later Early School Leaving. Research also discusses the fact that it is not just *what* a child experiences in their life; rather it is also *how* they experience it. A number of key themes recur in the research literature regarding the factors that increase the likelihood of Early School Leaving, by multiplying the influence of other factors (Axinn et al, 1997; Smyth and McCabe, 2001; Stokes, 2003). Caprara and Rutter (1995) posit that there are major differences in people's susceptibility or vulnerability to almost every type of environmental risk. Substantial literature shows that young people encountering the same influences and processes react in different ways. It also finds that some children are resilient to the negative effects of adverse conditions (Garmezy and Rutter, 1983; Furstenberg et al., 1987; Rolf et al. (eds.), 1990; Chariot, 1990, cited in Eurydice, 1994; Boldt, 1994; Bagley and Pritchard, 1998; Mayock, 2000).

Elder and Caspi (1990) spoke about factors and processes that alleviate or magnify the impact of other influences and causes. This is sometimes known as the 'accentuation principle' (Elder and Caspi, 1990, cited by Rutter and Smith, 1995). On the one hand, there is a mix of individual susceptibility, vulnerability and adversity that increases the likelihood of a child leaving school early. On the other, there is personal resilience and a variety of protective mechanisms that assist her/him to counter adversity and influence and remain in school (Rutter, 1990; Rutter and Smith, 1995). Stokes (2003) identifies many variables which affect resilience but identifies the first of these concerns as individual factors and personality features. These include temperament, intelligence and cognitive abilities, social and communication skills, autonomy, self-esteem and a positive social orientation (Rutter, 1990 quoting Garmezy, 1985; Hess, 1995). Goleman (1996) argues that 'emotional intelligence' of the individual is such a factor. Individual aspirations are also a highly predictive factor where educational aspirations at age 14 are highly predictive of subsequent behaviour

regarding participation in education (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Early School Leavers have a more negative academic self-image, that is, they are more inclined to feel unable to cope with their schoolwork. The group of students who invest very little time in homework and study are disproportionately likely to leave school at a later stage. More than a third of students who spent less than half an hour a night on homework at the start of first year left school early, compared with a tenth of those who spent more than two hours per night on homework. Educational aspirations in second year are predictive of subsequent behaviour with a third of those who intend to only complete the Junior Certificate leaving school early compared with 5 % of those who intended to go on for a degree (Byrne and Smyth, 2010).

There is also general agreement that a young person experiencing difficulties in making a key transition, (for example from primary to post-primary school), is significantly more likely to leave school early. Transition theory, (for example adolescence), covers ‘one or two major transitions in the child’s life that involve role changes: school entrances, moves and exits; biological maturation; possible cognitive reorganisations; or some combination’ (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1997: 9; Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993). ‘Turning points’, that is ‘events that might alter behaviours or contexts in which children operate’ are also identified, sometimes linked to transitions (Rutter, 1994). The underlying premise is that ‘transitional periods are characterised by developmental challenges that are relatively universal; that most individuals navigate transitional periods; and [that] these periods require new models of adaptation to biological, psychological or social changes’ (Graber and Brooks-Gunn 1996: 769). Many of these transitions are reflected in schooling (Eurydice, 1994). Each transition necessitates an adjustment to new circumstances. Children do not all react in the same way and some encounter difficulties which can manifest themselves in behavioural or learning difficulties, or vulnerability to Early School Leaving (Eurydice 1994; Mannoni 1979; CORI, 1996; Boldt, 1997). There is a broad consensus that difficulties with transitions are a direct cause of Early School Leaving (Boldt, 1994; Stokes, 1995; Boldt et al., 1998, Ryan, 1998). Stokes (2003) lists a range transitions and turning points such as adolescent turmoil, issues surrounding sexuality and gender; issues surrounding identity and self

esteem, the general transition to adulthood and disruptions such as conflict, separation, bereavement, periods of poverty and/or parental unemployment.

According to Freeney and O'Connell (2012), there is growing interest in possible resilience factors for people whose circumstances predispose them to negative social outcomes such as school dropout. They highlight how much of this interest focuses on so-called 'non-cognitive' abilities, that is, a constellation of skills that enable success in life, including attainment at school (Heckman et al., 2006). Neisser et al. (1996) argue that since measured intelligence only accounts for about 25% of the variance in school success, other non-cognitive factors such as persistence and willingness to study must be important. The value in studying non-cognitive abilities is that they are thought to be less fixed than cognitive ability and, therefore, more susceptible to advancement through intervention (Heckman et al., 2006). Factors that may be important include persistence, charm, motivation and preference for long-term goals (Heckman et al., 2006; Thomas et al., 2007).

Freeney and O'Connell (2012) also speak about 'delayed discounting' as having an effect on the choices made by some young people, where Early School Leaving can be viewed as a choice on the part of the student (Smyth, 1999). This choice can be calculated as the direct costs associated with schooling in addition to the perceived sacrifice of potential (lost) income, sometimes known as 'delay discounting'. 'Delay discounting' is defined as 'the extent to which the value of a reward decreases as the delay to obtaining that reward increases' (Hirsh et al., 2008: 1646). Applied to education, it is hypothesised that individuals with high levels of delay discounting may fail to recognise the benefits of school completion, instead opting for the immediacy of accessible, low-paid employment.

A study completed with Junior Certificate throughout Ireland (Freeney and O'Connell, 2012), shifts attention to the measurement and subjective norms within groups of Early School Leavers. The study used the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) to capture the dynamics of decision making. In the model, behavioural intention, (how people say they intend to act), is the most

immediate precursor of a specific behaviour (how they actually act). Intention in turn, is modelled as being determined by an individual's evaluation of the outcome of the behaviour in question (the 'attitude'), the perceived social pressure from others in relation to the behaviour (the 'social norm') and the perception of the ease or difficulty in carrying out the behaviour ('perceived behavioural control'). Davis et al. (2002) used the Theory of Planned Behaviour with a sample of Early School Leavers in the U.S. and showed a strong correlation between intention to leave school early and subsequent Early School Leaving. Their study in turn showed that intention to complete high school was related predominantly to beliefs about the long-term, (from example, being prepared for college, job training), rather than short-term consequences of staying in school.

Freeney and O'Connell's (2012) study displayed a striking difference between their study and the bulk of literature in the field as their study failed to show predictive links between social class, gender and Early School Leaving, leading them to suggest that considering Early School Leaving as a phenomenon particularly prevalent among males and individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds is a gross oversimplification, with Freeney and O'Connell (2012) suggesting that boys leave school not because they are male, but rather because of the different beliefs that they hold. Contrary to international data, in the study, intention to leave school early was not significantly predicted by the individual's level of economic deprivation nor by their gender. However, social class background was significantly related to both the individual's academic performance as well as their delay discounting while gender was significantly related to attitudes towards staying in school and subjective norms. Thus, Freeney and O'Connell (2012) posit that early identification of negative mindsets towards education process is of paramount importance and similar to Downes (2013), outline that the voice of the student must be heard (see also Downes, 2013). Factors such as gender and socioeconomic status will be discussed later in this report.

Pervasive teasing and bullying in a school may lead to disengagement and avoidance of school, distraction and inattentiveness in the classroom and

ultimately, poorer academic performance (Juvonen, Wang and Espinoza, 2011; Lacy and Cornell, 2011). Bullying and depression are interconnected issues. Apart from poverty related depression, emotional distress contributes to Early School Leaving. Emotional trauma such as bereavement, rape, sexual abuse, bullying and family break up can lead to Early School Leaving (Downes, 2012).

Overview Individual and Social Factors – Attitudes			
Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
			Status and Structure
			Practices
			Resources
School and Systemic Factors	Structure		
	Practices		

Figure 16: Overview of *Attitudes* within *Individual and Social Factors*

In summation:

- *Students' beliefs, values and attitudes are related to both their behaviour and to their performance in school.*
- *Factors such as a young person's personality can shape later Early School Leaving.*

- *The literature points to the multiplying influence of other factors such as individual susceptibility and vulnerability. On the one hand, there is a mix of individual susceptibility, vulnerability and adversity that increases the risk of Early School Leaving. On the other hand, there is a personal resilience and variety of protective mechanisms that assist the student to counter adversity and excel in school.*
- *Higher individual educational aspirations are associated with lower Early School Leaving rates at upper second level. However, at lower second level the correlation is less obvious. Educational aspirations in second year are predictive of subsequent school behaviours.*
- *A young person who experiences difficulties with transitions has an increased likelihood of leaving school early, where there is a direct link between difficult transitions, (such as the transition from primary to post primary school), and Early School Leaving.*
- *Pervasive teasing, bullying, depression and emotional trauma increase the risks of Early School Leaving.*

1.4.4 Social Background

Using Rumberger and Lin (2008), social background will be divided into: Past Experiences, Health and Family. Following Lyche (2010), Family will be further subdivided in to Demographics, Family Status and Structure, Family Practices and Family Resources.

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
			Status and Structure
			Practices
			Resources
School and Systemic Factors	Structure		
	Practices		

Figure 17: Elements of *Social Background*

1.4.4.1 Past Experiences

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
			Status and Structure
Practices			
Resources			
School and Systemic Factors	Structure		
	Practices		

Figure 18: Positioning of *Past Experiences* within *Individual and Social Factors*

Students' past experiences may influence whether students leave school early or graduate, largely through effects on their attitudes, behaviours and educational performance (Rumberger and Lim, 2008) as discussed above. Participation in preschool has been the subject of extensive research. A growing body of evidence has found that high quality preschool can not only improve school readiness and early school success, but long-term follow-up studies have found that preschool can also improve a wide range of adolescent and adult outcomes, including high school completion, and less criminal activity, reliance on welfare and teen parenting (Barnett and Belfield, 2006; Gorey, 2001). Longitudinal analyses since 1986 have found that students who participated in preschool had graduation rates of 10% or higher than non-participants, even after controlling for an index of family risk factors, race, ethnicity and gender (Lyche, 2010).

1.4.4.2 Health

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
			Status and Structure
			Practices
			Resources
School and Systemic Factors	Structure		
	Practices		

Figure 19: Positioning of ***Health*** within *Individual and Social Factors*

Several studies have also found that poor health is also correlated to higher Early School Leaving rates (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Having a learning disability also highly affects the dropout rate (Markussen, 2010; Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

1.4.4.3 Family

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
Status and Structure			
Practices			
Resources			
School and Systemic Factors	Structure		
	Practices		

Figure 20: Positioning of ***Family*** within *Individual and Social Factors*

1.4.4.3.1 Demographics

1.4.4.3.1.1 Gender

There is a considerable amount of international research demonstrating that male students are more likely than female students to leave school early compared to their female counterparts (Rumberger, 1995; Byrne et. al., 2009; Croll, 2009). Research and data indicate that Early School Leaving patterns in Ireland differ significantly by gender (Byrne et. al., 2009; DES, 2007; Smyth, 2009). Girls began to outnumber boys among Intermediate Certificate candidates from the 1950s onwards (DES, 2007). From the 1960s onwards, female participation in senior cycle education accelerated at a faster pace than amongst males (DES, 2007). Since that time to the present day, females outnumber males amongst Leaving Certificate students and as a result, young

males are consistently overrepresented in the Early School Leaver group (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). International research corroborates this. In the Netherlands, a male is seven times more likely to leave school before having completed lower second level than a female, however in upper second level there is no difference (Traag and van der Velden, 2008). In Denmark, boys tend to leave typical female gendered fields and girls tend to leave typically male gendered fields (Markussen, 2010). In Romania, male students have a higher tendency to leave school early than females (Gyonos, 2011). European Union figures indicate males represent 12.5% of Early School Leavers, whilst females represent 9.5% (European Commission, 2016). In Ireland, Early School Leaving figures for 2015 show an Early School Leaving rate of 8.4% for males compared to a 5.4% for females (European Commission, 2016). Female Early School Leavers tend to leave school at an earlier age than their male counterparts. In the school year, 2010/11, over 20% (865) of females left after year 1 or 2 of the Junior Certificate or Junior Certificate Schools Programme, (JCSP), compared to under 20% (708) of males (DES, 2013).

1.4.4.3.1.2 Ethnicity

Ethnicity and race represent another instance of how other factors affect the relationship of these characteristics with Early School Leaving behaviour. Being a member of a minority also has a significant effect on the Early School Leaving rate. In Australia, the indigenous population has a markedly lower completion rate than non-indigenous population (Lamb et al., 2004). In the U.S., the dropout rate is higher for African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans (Lyche, 2010). Young people born abroad tend to be over-represented among those leaving school early in many European countries (European Commission, 2016). 2015 figures for Ireland show that foreign-born Early School Leavers at 6.8% perform only slightly below native-born Early School Leavers at 7% (European Commission, 2016). This can be considered to be the case because the migrant population of Ireland is composed mainly of European Union citizens, primarily from the United Kingdom and central Europe (the Baltic States and Poland) (European Commission, 2016). Insufficient skills in the language of instruction are amongst the factors that can

have an impact on the education attainment of students from migrant or ethnic minority backgrounds (European Commission, 2013). In terms of ethno-cultural minority groups, Roma and Irish Travellers have often been identified as being amongst the most disadvantaged groups in education and consequently at greater risk of leaving school early (Luciak, 2006; Jugovic and Doolan, 2013; European Commission, 2014). Research results presented in a Hungarian study by Kertesi-Kézdi (2010), for example, indicate that about 50% of the total Roma population finishes upper second level school, compared to the 85% of the non-Roma population. European Union figures show that 19% of Early School Leaving are foreign born in comparison to 10.1% native born (European Commission, 2016). The UK has a slightly higher rate of Early School Leaving amongst those born in the country (European Commission, 2014). Students with a migrant background constitute a rather heterogeneous group and diversity prevails over common characteristics (European Commission, 2014). For instance, differences exist between newly arrived migrant children and second generation migrants. The latter group usually experiences greater success at school than the recent arrivals (Luciak, 2004). Data on school completion rates in the United Kingdom (England), for instance, show that students from certain ethnic backgrounds, for example, those of Chinese and Indian origin perform better in education than students of African Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, or Roma and Traveller students (Luciak, 2006). It is important to stress that it is the socioeconomic/family background and having adequate learning support that seems to play a more critical role in successful educational outcomes rather than the ‘migrant’ or ‘non-migrant’ background (European Commission, 2013). In this sense, having a ‘foreign’ origin does not inevitably put students at risk of early leaving. Nevertheless, the fact that the migrant population is relatively more affected by socioeconomic disadvantage than the population as a whole, must be taken into account, and this could explain the lower performance and attainment of migrant children at school (European Commission, 2013). Across the European Union, the Early School Leaving rate for migrants is double that of native students and the rate is higher again amongst the Roma population (European Council, 2009).

Byrne and Smyth (2010) also highlight the notion that newcomers in the

broadest sense are also at greater risk of Early School Leaving. In keeping with minorities, students with disabilities have much higher dropout rates than students without disabilities (Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

1.4.4.3.2 Family Status and Structure

1.4.4.3.2.1 Family Status

Family background has long been recognised as the single most important contributor to success in school (Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks et al., 1972). Early School Leaving is especially high among students from families of low socioeconomic status (Garnier et al., 1997; Jimerson et al., 2000). Socioeconomic status (SES), typically measured by parental education, occupation and low income, is generally found to be associated with Early School Leaving (Eivers et al., 2000). There is a strong link between leaving education and social disadvantage (European Parliament, 2011), with many studies confirming that low socioeconomic status is one of the key factors that can increase the risk of Early School Leaving (European Commission, 2014). In general, Early School Leavers are much more likely to come from families with a low socioeconomic status i.e. unemployed parents, low household income, and low levels of parental education, or to belong to vulnerable social groups such as migrants (European Parliament, 2011). A low level of parental education is also considered a major contributing risk factor (OECD, 2013). The level of education of the mother, in particular, is associated with higher risk (Nevala et al., 2011). It has been found that parents with low level of education are less effective in developing the cultural capital of their children (Flouri and Ereky-Stevens, 2008). Amongst children with low-educated parents, the risk of leaving school early is nearly five times higher than for children whose parents have a second level qualification and more than ten times higher than for children whose parents hold a tertiary degree (Lavrijsen and Nicaise, 2013).

Several large studies highlight the role of social status and parental education in educational achievement. A major British study shows that social background determines students' success. A study by academics at University College

London (UCL) and Kings College London has given statistical backbone to the view that the overwhelming factor in how well children do is not what type of school they attend, but their social class. The report, matches almost 1 million students with their individual postcode and exam scores at 11 and 15 years of age. The study looked at 476,000 11-year olds and 482,000 15-year-olds. In affluent areas, such as Dukes Avenue, Muswell Hill, in north London, and Lammas Park Road, Ealing, West London, the study would expect 67% of 11-year-olds to achieve level 5 in the national English tests and 94% of 15-year olds to get five or more passes at GCSE at grade C and above. Meanwhile, of the children growing up in more deprived areas, such as Hillside Road, Dudley, or Laurel Road, Tipton (both in the West Midlands), just 13% are likely to get the top level 5 in the national English tests for 11-year-olds, while only 24% of 15-year-olds will be reckoned to achieve the benchmark five-plus GCSEs at grade C and above.

In another U.K. study, Hamnett et al. (2007) examine the variation in school performance for London and specifically east London. They show how the disadvantaged nature of the area and ethnic heritage helps to explain the poor results at GCSE. The authors demonstrate that, although ethnicity accounts for some of the variation in performance, this is considerably less than that accounted for by social background.

The Millennium Cohort Study (2010) (see Hansen et al., 2010) conducted by the Institute of Education in London and commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council carried out a study of 11,000 seven year olds and concluded that parents' social class had a bigger influence on a child's progress between the ages of five and seven than a range of parenting techniques, including reading before bedtime. The study found that those with parents in professional and managerial jobs were at least eight months ahead of students from the most socially disadvantaged homes, where parents were often unemployed. The researchers tested the children on skills including reading, mathematics and listening and analysed their teachers' assessments. The Millennium Cohort Study (2010) has been tracking children in England,

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland through their early childhood and is following them into adulthood (see Hansen et al., 2010). The Millennium Cohort Study (2010) builds on the Consequences of Childhood Disadvantage in Northern Ireland at Age 5 (see Sullivan et al., 2009) which concluded that social class and parental education had particularly powerful effects on predicting the cognitive and educational outcomes, and also consistently predicted behavioural difficulties, indicating that parenting is important, and that a policy focus on parenting alone is insufficient to tackle the impact of social inequalities on children (Kiernan and Mensah, 2009).

Major reports from the Sutton Trust (Waldfogel and Washbrook, 2010) and the National Equality Panel (Hill et al., 2010) both emphasise the importance of a child's social background on their academic attainment, exam results and college prospects and stress the need to improve the educational attainment of poor children (Waldfogel and Washbrook, 2010). Research from the Sutton Trust (Waldfogel and Washbrook, 2010) which draws on work conducted by the Millennium Cohort Study (2010) shows, in keeping with earlier work by Hart and Risley (1995), that by the age of five, children from low-income families are significantly less advanced in their educational development. In particular, the vocabulary of five year old children growing up in the poorest fifth of families is already almost one year (11.1 months) behind that of children from middle income families and more than 16 months behind those from the most affluent families. Much of this gap is a result of differing parenting styles, specifically regular bedtimes, parental reading and trips to libraries, galleries and museums, thus helping to create what Bourdieu (1984) termed the 'cultural veneer', which will provide middle socioeconomic status students with cultural as well as linguistic capital to prepare them for schooling and the wider world. Even allowing for these differences, however, children from low-income families start school three months behind middle class children, largely because of poorer health and material deprivation (for example, lack of internet access at home) (see also Hill et. al, 2010). In Ireland, studies have shown that there is a strong geographic and community dimension to under-representation at third level, with stark differences in participation rates at third level across Dublin with figures ranging from 99% participation in

third level in Dublin 6 to 15% in Dublin 17; nationally, participation rates vary from 60% in Galway to 41% in Laois, with the average being 51% (see HEA, 2014).

Living in a geographical area with high unemployment or in remote areas or small cities, (as opposed to living in medium sized or large cities), increases the chance of being an Early School Leaver (Eurofound, 2012). Dale (2010) refers to the clustering of young people of certain family backgrounds and communities with particular patterns of occupation, migrant/minority origins, low level of educational achievement and low income produces a certain form of class and ethnic 'ghettoisation' with an increased risk of Early Leaving.

Peers have a significant influence on Early School Leaving. Those who leave school early are more likely to have friends who leave school early (Finn, 1989; Eivers et al., 2000). However, gender moderates the nature of this association, with males more likely than females to cite friends leaving school early as a reason for their own leaving school early (Jordan, Lara and McPartland, 1996). Factors such as the nature of the residential environment may affect the nature of peer influence. Overcrowded living conditions may force children to play on the streets. In areas where there is overcrowding, children have restricted contact with adults and are more susceptible to peer group influence (Garner and Raudenbusch, 1991).

Crane (1991) found that when the percentage of what he termed 'high status' workers in a neighbourhood dropped below 4%, there was a dramatic increase in Early School Leaving rates. For example, the estimated Early School Leaving probability was almost 15 times greater once the percentage of high status workers dropped below 4%.

International research has consistently indicated the existence of social class inequalities in educational attainment (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993). In the Irish context too, the likelihood of Early School Leaving is significantly structured by parental social class background.

1.4.4.3.2 Family Structure

Empirical evidence displays a number of points about correlations between family size and Early School Leaving. Students living with both parents have lower Early School Leaving rates and higher rates of graduation than those living under other family arrangements (Astone and McLanahan, 1991; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Rumberger, 1983; Rumberger and Lim, 2008; Stokes, 2003). However, chances of Early School Leaving in lower second level also increases in families with an only child, while the same factor does not affect upper second level completion however (Traag and van der Velden, 2008). Three family structural experiences feature in the literature on Early School Leaving: marital breakdown, parental remarriage and living with a single parent (normally female headed) (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Stokes (2003) highlights that though there is general association between parental separation and Early School Leaving, the direct effects are weak.

Eivers et al.'s (2000) study found that Early School Leavers had more siblings than students in their comparison group, in keeping with other research (Alexander, Entwisle and Horsey, 1997). Although a smaller proportion of Early School Leavers displayed that their comparison group lived with both parents, the difference was not statistically significant. However, the percentage from both the Early School Leavers' group and the comparison groups living in a household headed by a lone parent was higher than the national average of the time (CSO, 1997). In Eivers et al.'s (2000) study, the majority of Early School Leavers lived with both parents, supporting Barrington and Hendricks' (1989) questioning of the assumption that the typical dropout comes from a 'broken' home.

1.4.4.3.3 Family Practices

Rumberger (1995) criticised previous research on Early School Leaving for focusing too much on socioeconomic status and structural characteristics of family and for not examining family processes and parenting styles. A growing body of research indicates that limited parental involvement in schooling, poor

parental aspirations, lack of supervision and a permissive parenting style are associated with Early School Leaving (Astone and McLanahan, 1991; Rumberger, 1995). Morgan et al.'s (1998) study found that socioeconomic status and home atmosphere variables, (home organisation, parental expectations and parent-child interaction), explained two to three times as much of the variance in reading achievement as socioeconomic status alone. In keeping with this, authors in both educational and sociological fields have criticised theoretical frameworks and explanations of Early School Leaving, educational disadvantage and disadvantage for a tendency to blame the victim by shifting the focus of the failure towards the young people and their families (see Smyth, 2005; Brown and Rodriguez, 2008).

Sociological research has expanded to look at the way in which educational outcomes are shaped by broader social structures, particularly social class. Earlier studies of social inequality focused on social class differences in the role of aspirations in educational attainment (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). This body of research was grounded on the belief that class differences exist in levels of aspirations (see Hyman, 1953; Kahl, 1953). These studies argued that lower socioeconomic class families accord less priority to college education and are less ambitious than middle socioeconomic class families. These class-based differences in educational and occupational aspirations were viewed as contributing to the reproduction of inequality. Further research in the 1960s and 1970s, which became known as the 'status attainment' theory, similarly argued that aspirations are a central part of maintaining social position from one generation to the next. These studies suggested that educational attainment is the outcome of the joint effects of family background and academic ability (Blau and Duncan, 1967), which are brought about by the mutual reinforcing influences of expectation and aspirations for the future (Sewell et al., 1969, 1970). Therefore, individuals such as parents, teachers, peers, base their expectations on a student's family background and observable academic performance. Students then internalise these expectations and these expectations become the individuals' aspirations. This view of society failed to

take in to account how broader social structures shape educational outcomes as opposed to the individual socialisation process.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1973) Cultural Reproduction Theory is a theory which focuses on social structures such as schooling, and on how such social structures shape educational outcomes. This theory must be considered in any discussion of family and its associated practices, bearing in mind that the family and its practices are inherently linked to the family's socioeconomic status. A family's socioeconomic status and its social and cultural norms and mores come face to face with those of the school system when a child begins school. The effect of any discontinuity between these two systems can have far reaching consequences for a child.

1.4.4.3.1 Cultural Reproduction Theory

This report has highlighted how family background is recognised as the most important contributor to school success, where the family's socioeconomic status is considered one of the greatest predictors of Early School Leaving. Though Rumberger and Lim (2008) have criticised the literature for its focus on socioeconomic status, advising that emphasis should be placed on family practices and parenting styles, it can be considered that family practices and parenting styles are an explicit articulation of a family's socioeconomic status, thus making it difficult to separate the two. For Bourdieu (1973), school is about much more than the transmission of knowledge. His Cultural Reproduction Theory sets out how systems such as schooling transmit and perpetuate social and cultural practices from one generation to the next, with the school system championing its own middle class social and cultural norms and mores.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) considered that the processes of schooling are one of the main mechanisms of cultural reproduction, where this process of cultural reproduction does not operate solely through *what* is taught. Bourdieu's (1973) concept of 'cultural capital' refers to the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, credentials and so forth that one acquires through being part of a particular social class. Sharing similar forms of cultural capital creates a collective

identity and group position i.e. congruence. However, some forms of cultural capital are valued more than others and can be a source of individual social mobility such as income or wealth. Having the same cultural capital as the school system values, therefore, immediately places a child at an advantage compared to a child who does not have such cultural capital. Thus, for Bourdieu (1973), cultural capital is a major source of wealth. Bourdieu (1973) extended the concept of cultural capital to discuss the individual's 'habitus', where habitus is the physical embodiment of cultural capital i.e. the habits, skills, and dispositions that one possesses due to one's life experiences. Habitus gives individuals a sense of how to react in specific situations, without continually having to make fully conscious decisions. It is this practical sense, often described as a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1973) where habitus allows one to successfully navigate social environments and helps to explain how cultural capital and habitus affect how a child moves successfully or otherwise through the school system. Family life, therefore, can provide resources which yield important dividends. Cultural resources such as values, attitudes, language skills and styles of interaction are required in the school environment. Students' success in school is predicated therefore, on a student's ability to tap in to the dominant culture of schooling. Bearing in mind that it has been suggested that the system of schooling in Ireland is predicated on a middle class language style which is not available to all students (INTO, 2000), success therefore, within the education system ultimately depends upon one's ability to tap into its cultural norms, including the formal language of schooling.

1.4.4.3.2 Linguistic Disadvantage

As outlined above, the socioeconomic status of a family finds its expression through the social and cultural practices of that family. The language styles and practices used by a family can be considered as a further extension of this. Linguistic discontinuity, therefore, can be considered another form of discontinuity which can be experienced by a child when his/her language practices and styles differ from that championed by the school system. Linguistic discontinuity is best considered by turning briefly to the work of British sociologist Basil Bernstein. Bernstein (1971) explained linguistic

discontinuity as being grounded in the use of two language ‘codes’ – an elaborated code, used in the school system and a restricted code, used amongst friends and family and other intimately knit groups. Whilst no one code is better than the other, as the school system is predicated on a middle class elaborated code, a child’s success or otherwise in the school system then depends upon their ability to tap into such an elaborated code. Bernstein (1971) considered that speakers use both of these codes, depending on context. However, he was of the view that language and socialisation were inextricably linked. Thus, for Bernstein, whilst some children can switch and manipulate between both codes, depending on context, these opportunities are more readily available to the middle socioeconomic status child, due to their socialisation process.

Many children come to school with an ability to interact with their peers, teachers and others using *both* formal and informal linguistic codes, adapting their language use in accordance with the appropriacy of context and content. However, some children rely more heavily on an informal linguistic code when in school, which can impact upon their ability to benefit fully from the range of experiences in school settings. The consequences of linguistic discontinuity are far reaching for the individual with research positioning linguistic disadvantage as both a contributory and concomitant factor of disadvantage and educational disadvantage (OECD, 2006).

According to Bernstein (1971), the elaborated code orients the child to use a language that is context-free, while the restricted code orients him/her to a relatively context-bound speech. This results in the restricted speaker being only able to communicate effectively with those with whom they share many assumptions and meanings. The elaborated code speaker has no difficulty in this respect since his/her speech is tied to the here and now. The restricted code speaker is seen to find it difficult to verbalise his/her intent. The two codes therefore, give access to two different orders of meaning. The restricted code gives access only to particularistic orders in which principles remain implicit and are therefore, not open to reconsideration and change. The elaborated code speaker is open to universalistic orders in which principles are made explicit and are therefore, open to change (Bernstein, 1962b).

As Bernstein (1970) argues that the knowledge which schools transmit is elaborated, there is scope therefore, for degrees of mismatch between knowledge and control (Atkinson, 1985). According to Bernstein's theory of codes, the middle socioeconomic status child will be more able to adapt to the elaborated code of the school. The middle socioeconomic status, being more geographically, socially and culturally mobile has access to both the restricted codes and elaborated codes (Atherton, 2002). That schools require an elaborated code for success means that lower socioeconomic status children are disadvantaged by the dominant code of schooling (Sadovnik, 2001). Bernstein (1958: 169) claims the lower socioeconomic status child who has been socialised within the confines of restricted code usage will be at a distinct disadvantage with regard to formal education.

Bernstein (1960) also came to consider family role systems and in particular, to what extent families from different social backgrounds have different attitudes and relationships, and how different social relationships affect the use of language.

Bernstein (1971) concluded that familial control is different for different classes. Specifically, he attested that there exists two distinct types of family with respect to the manner in which parents control their children in the regulative context. In positional families, children are controlled in terms of status. The parent focuses on "general attributes of the child, upon his age, sex, or age-related status" (Bernstein, 1973a: 185-9). In person-orientated families, the parent focuses on "particular attributes of the child, those...specific to him" (Bernstein, 1973a: 185-9). In a person-oriented family, control involves the making explicit of principles, reasons and motives, a different kind of language will be used by the parent in this kind of family than that used by a parent in the positional type. The child in a positional family will lack such explicitness since the child hears language used to reinforce the present social arrangements rather than to explicate intents and principles, as the latter are taken for granted.

Bernstein (1971) considers that the different types of control exercised in positional and personal families will necessitate two different types of language use in the parent. Therefore, the child will internalise the type of speech

presented to him/her in such a way that will orient him/her to specific uses of language in him/her adult life, thus, restricting the modes of control available to him/her in school and as a future parent.

More than thirty years ago, pointing to the potential correlation between the verbal interactions experienced with adults in the home and school success, Gordon Wells (1979: 75) commented that linguistic disadvantage is “the putative cause of the educational under-achievement of many children”. Bearing in mind previous discussions on the significance of educational performance’s impact on Early School Leaving, this is especially pertinent.

This notion of discontinuity between the two environments of home and school and the two languages and cultures is also presented by the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation in their paper on tackling educational disadvantage, as being of seminal importance

...part of the problem [of educational disadvantage] can be explained by the concept of discontinuity, that the culture of the school, predicated on middle class language style and behavioural norms, makes it appear an inhospitable place (Poverty and Educational Disadvantage, Breaking the Cycle; INTO 1994:28-29)

Corson’s (2001: 1) affirmation of how crucial language ability is in the school setting indicates how the replication of the cycle of disadvantage can occur

...children’s differences in language ability, more than any other observable factor, affect their potential for success in schooling...that language is the central achievement necessary for success in schooling...

Similarly, after working on her seminal ethnography *Ways With Words*, Shirley Brice Heath, (1983) declared that the language socialisation process is most powerful in accounting for academic success.

Linguistic discontinuity, whilst not a risk factor for Early School Leaving, is positioned in the literature as a concomitant element of disadvantage, where disadvantage can be seen to lead to linguistic discontinuity, which in turn leads

to educational disadvantage, all of which increase the risk of Early School Leaving for the student who experiences discontinuity. In keeping with this, Stokes (2003) highlights that Early School Leaving occurs in the literature as a risk or causal factor in various forms of disadvantage and disaffection *and* as a phenomenon in its own right.

Signs of difficulty are usually in existence from an early age and as children progress through the school system, the achievement gap between students from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds tends to widen (see Drudy, 2009; Howard, 2010). As evidenced throughout this discussion, this can lead to a process of disengagement where, eventually, the student from a disadvantaged background is likely to leave school early with poor formal qualifications and poor employment prospects (see Christensen, 2010; Gay, 2010; Delpit and Dowdy, 2003).

1.4.4.3.3 Returning to Congruence

The above discussion brings the notion of congruence to the fore. Within educational research, there has been a growing interest in the impact that families and schools have on student performance. As mentioned earlier, Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986, 1994) work on Ecological Systems Theory is used to detail children's development within a series of interrelated environmental systems. Much research has focused on the protective factors embedded within either the home *or* the school environments (see Bates, 2005; Fan and Chen, 2001), more recent research is highlighting the need for development of collaborative school-family partnerships, which are believed to be essential for promoting positive outcomes for students (Glueck and Reschly, 2014; Christenson and Reschly, 2010). This collaboration is seen to be of particular significance as protective factors for children at risk of academic failure (Christenson and Sheridan, 2001; Pianta and Walsh, 1996, 1998). Authors have discussed the specific influence of school-family partnerships in reducing the level of academic, behavioural and emotional risk for students throughout their development (Stormshak, Dishion and Falkenstein, 2010;

Webster-Stratton and Reid, 2010). This is particularly pertinent bearing in mind the above discussion in relation to the home-school discontinuities.

In keeping with the above discussion on such discontinuities and the work of Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1986, 1994), conceptualising risk from an ecological systems theory perspective, researchers have cited the quality of school-family partnerships as a primary contributing factor to the level of child risk (Pianta and Walsh, 1996). Reschly and Christenson (2009:9) stated:

For students and families who are at higher risk of poor outcomes (e.g. those living in poverty, students with disabilities), the mesosystem of home and school takes on greater importance as a factor that either exacerbates these risk conditions or ameliorates them by promoting additional learning opportunities aimed at enhancing positive outcomes for youth.

This represents a shift from focusing on the *microsystem* (home *or* school) to the *mesosystem* influences of a successful school-family partnership. Whereas numerous investigations exist reporting significant correlations between parent involvement indicators, (such as home-school communication, parental aspirations, participation in school activities), and student success (Fan and Chen, 2001; Ginsburg-Block, Manz and McWayne, 2010; Reynolds and Clements, 2005), and demonstrating the positive influence of parent/family components in interventions aimed at changing student learning and behaviour (Bates, 2005; Guli, 2005), less research has been done investigating the mesosystemic, reciprocal interactions that characterise school-family relationships or partnerships.

Congruence between these environments is an integral variable in facilitating student success (Christenson, 2004; Christenson and Anderson, 2002; Finn and Rock, 1997). Speara and Matto (2007) proposed a contextual-congruence model that focuses on the degree of congruence among socialising agents as key for healthy child development, for example, the level of match or similarity among values, goals, expectations, and aspirations advocated for and acted on by stakeholders across different contexts in a child's life (in keeping with the above discussion on discontinuity and Bourdieu's (1971) ideas on

reproduction). They posited that children who have higher levels of congruence across social contexts will be more likely to behaviourally and socially commit to these social contexts. Christenson and Peterson's (1998) review of more than 200 studies on school, family or community influences found that students perform optimally when they experience congruence in the following six factors: standards and expectations; structure; opportunity to learn; support; climate/relationships and modelling.

The construct of congruence is also discussed at length by authors investigating at risk populations. Pianta and Walsh (1996, 1998) identified congruence in messages provided by home and school environments as a contributing factor in maintaining low levels of risk for poor student outcomes. They also discussed the specific impact that incongruence can have on children, stating that children who have conflicting or incongruent messages from their home and school with regard to the importance of learning, will likely derive meaning from these messages, resulting in conflicting emotions, motivations or goals. Phelan, Davidson and Yu (1998) highlight that adolescents who experience discontinuity between home, school and peer system have the most difficulty making transitions among different contexts and are at greater risk of poor school performance or mental health concerns. Hess and Holloway (1984) found that a consensus pertaining to the goals of education was essential to counter information from competing sources such as peers or the media and discontinuities between families and schools compromised parents' and teachers' effectiveness as socialising agents. Hansen (1996) found positive achievement gains from 3rd to 6th grade for students who experienced congruence in rules and interaction styles among home and school environments. Peet, Powell and O'Donnell (1997) found that children of mother-teacher dyads who were more congruent in terms of the perceptions of child competence and school engagement, had significantly higher grade point averages than did children of mother-teacher dyads who were less congruent.

1.4.4.3.3.4 Levels of Parental Education and Training

Having positioned the family in the above respect, the manner in which it can affect the student becomes all the more evident. In keeping with the points outlined above, the research features significant discussion on the effect of low levels of parental education and training. Research shows that the socioeconomic status and the educational attainment of parents are amongst the strongest determinants of Early School Leaving (European Commission, 2015). The higher a parent's level of education, the greater the child's preference for staying in school (Stokes, 2003; Breen, 1984a; 1984b; Gambetta, 1987; Morgan, 1998; European Commission, 2014; Thibert, 2013; McGarr, 2010). Hammond et al., (2007) indicates that the mother's education has the greatest impact. Parents themselves often cite low levels of parental education as a cause of Early School Leaving (Boldt, 1994). Some research highlights how many parents are, or at least, feel unable to help their children for example, with homework once they enter post primary school (Boldt, 1994; Morgan, 1998). Others mention lack of reading materials and resources (Smith et al., 1997; Morgan, 1998). However, this latter point, particularly bearing in mind the above discussion, could be considered 'filmsy' (Stokes, 2003:66), and as such, representing part of the 'cultural veneer' (Bourdieu, 1986) discussed by Bourdieu (1986) which features as part of cultural reproduction.

The educational model shown by parents and siblings is seen to influence Early School Leaving. More often than not, students who leave school early come from families where parents do not have more than eight years of study completed (Gyonos, 2014). However, there are exceptions as well. The educational model shown by siblings appears to be more important. If there is an elder child who dropped out school, there are high chances that the younger sibling will do likewise (Gyonos, 2014). Eivers et al., (2000) highlights that there is a greater change of Early School Leaving when there is another Early School Leaver in the family.

Overall, it seems that low levels of parental education form part of a constellation of factors and processes which predispose young people to leave school early.

1.4.4.3.3.5 Lack of Esteem for, or Utilitarian View of Education

Many researchers have found that parents of Early School Leavers hold education and/or schooling, in low esteem. In many instances, parents' emphasis was on the purely functional aspects of education and the literature often cites the contradiction between lack of parental awareness of the importance of education and the general lack of ambition for their children (Roseingrave, 1971; Eurydice, 1994; Erikson and Johnson, 1996; Smyth and McCabe, 2001). Boldt (1994) argues that the most important factor in Early School Leaving apart from school experiences is the clear absence of any significant involvement, positive influence or encouragement from parents. Drudy and Lynch (1993) maintain that parents of Early School Leavers are aware of the importance of education but economic pressures leaves them with little time to worry about schooling.

1.4.4.3.3.6 Lack of Interest by Parents in their Child's Education; Low Parental Motivation and Fatalism

Evidence suggests that positive attitudes and future orientation in parents influence young people to stay in school and that pessimism and fatalism influence them towards, or facilitate them in leaving (Eurydice, 1994; Goleman, 1996, Morgan, 1998; Craft, 1972; Boldt, 1994). It must be outlined that none of these factors act in isolation from each other (Stokes, 2003), with Boldt (1994) arguing that if a child's problematic experiences in school are not counterbalanced by the home, they are thus intensified (see also Morgan, 1998).

1.4.4.3.3.7 Parenting Practices and Styles

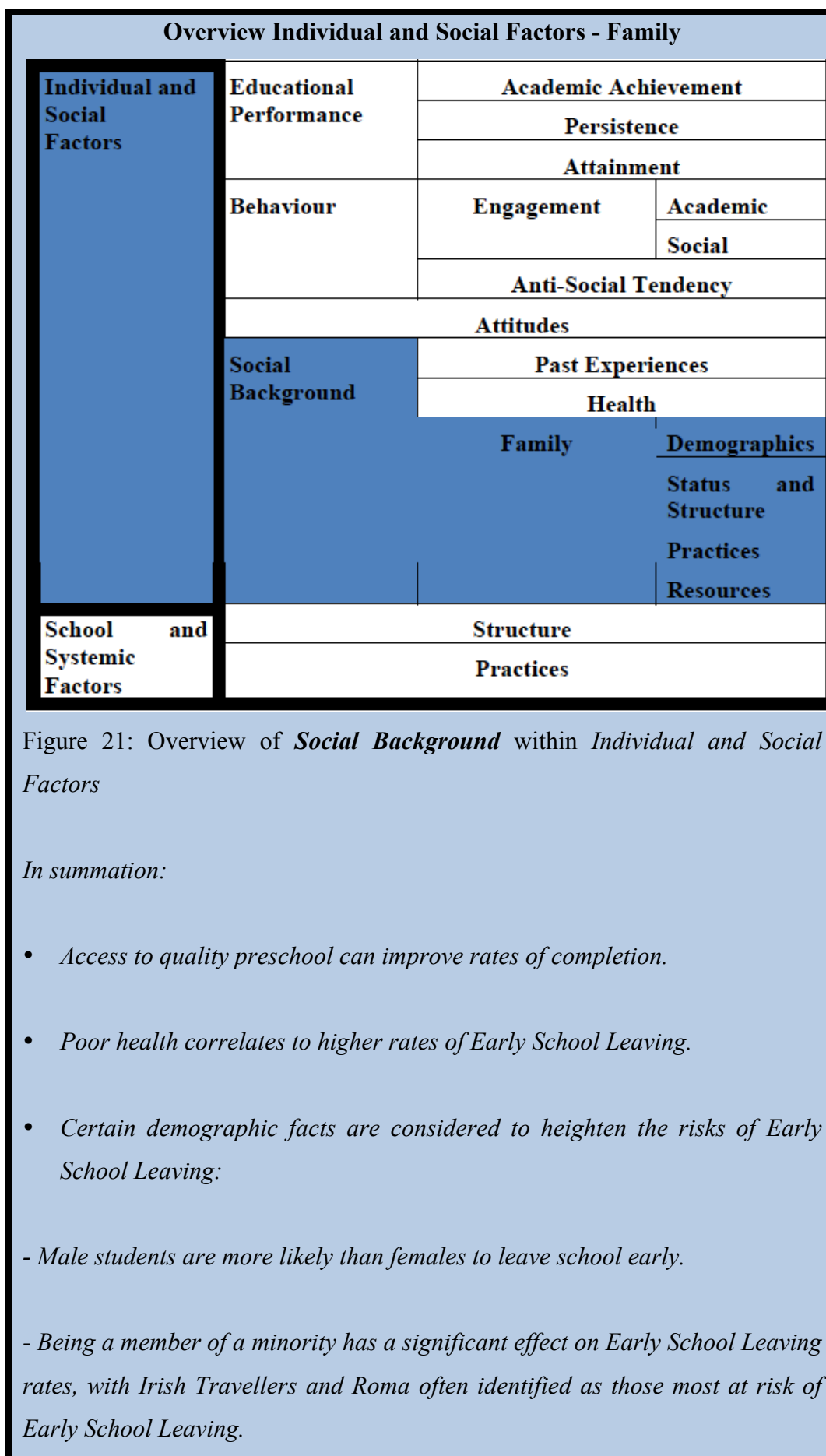
As discussed above, practices and styles of parenting are also considered another influence (Hanson et al., 1997). Hess (1995) outlines that young people living in families characterised by high levels of conflict, or by parents who are not able to provide adequate supervision, effective discipline and emotional support have an increased risk of school problems, academic failure, leaving school early, unemployment, psychosocial disorders, decreased feelings of self-competence, poor peer relationships and early sexual activity and unwanted pregnancy. Among the influential factors noted in the literature are aggression,

violence and arbitrary discipline (Goleman, 1996; Conger et al., 1997; Hanson et al., 1997). Thus, the child's early home environment, including family stresses, and the quality of the care-giving are found to significantly influence school retention (Garnier et al., 1997; Jimerson et al., 2000). Similarly, attachment theory argues that early attachment experiences with parents are internalised as a model of attachment which in turn regulates and predicts how a person will behave in relationships, especially with her/his own children (Bowlby, 1969). A number of patterns of attachment are identified, for example secure, secure-avoidant, secure-resistant and disorganised/disoriented (Bowlby, 1969). Similarly, four analogous patterns of adult attachment are identified: secure, dismissing, preoccupied and unresolved (Bowlby, 1969). A 'transmission gap' is also identified whereby some secure parents have insecure children, and vice versa (Gaffney et al., 2000). The adversities associated with the category 'insecure mother with insecure infant' suggest a possible link with Early School Leaving. Some researchers support this view (Eurydice, 1994).

1.4.4.3.4 Family Resources

The availability and use of a family's economic resources in sustaining educational participation features in the literature with many researchers regarding restricted family income as the primary factor behind many negative aspects of family functioning (Hanson et al., 1997). The view that success or failure at school is closely linked to the economic conditions of the child's background has been discussed above and is widely supported (see Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Eurydice, 1994; Smyth and McCabe, 2001). The Rational Choice Model first put forth by Erikson and Jonsson (1996) has been used to explain this further. The Rational Choice perspective argues that class inequalities in educational attainment arise from the fact that, in pursuing any given goal, different social distances have to be travelled (Goldthorpe, 1996), or different opportunities and constraints navigated, depending on one's class origins (Boudon, 1974; Keller and Zavalloni, 1964). In this model, educational choices are made according to the perceived costs and benefits associated with continued participation. However, it follows that differential costs and benefits will be involved for different social groups. Middle socioeconomic status

families for example, are more likely to risk social demotion from professional occupations by not going on to college, while working class students may evaluate their chances of college success more negatively (Erikson and Jonsson, 1996). Variation in outcomes is related to a number of factors such as a lack of economic resources which limits participation in education if families cannot afford the direct and indirect costs involved, the different cultural resources available to a social group and so on (see Eurydice, 1994). Other factors such as the 'push-pull' factors of the labour market for low skilled workers (Budge et al., 2000) which may be either a necessity or a choice for the young person also feature. In particular, part time employment while at school may serve to ease a young person's pathway in to full time employment (Smyth and McCoy, 2004; Byrne, 2008), though research is inconsistent in this respect. In contrast, the absence of employment opportunities in the local area may discourage young people from leaving school (Raffe and Willms, 1989). The 'pull' of available employment opportunities during the boom in Ireland has been considered to have countered any effects of measure designed to improve school retention figures (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). The research suggests that daily stressors involving family finances have a particularly strong direct influence on the school performance of adolescents (Conger et al., 1997).



- Newcomers and those with disabilities have much higher rates of Early School Leaving.

- Research continues to show that family is the most important contributor to school success, with the family's socioeconomic status being one of the strongest predictors of Early School Leaving.*
- A low level of parental education is considered a major risk. The level of the mother's education is associated with greater risk.*
- Living in a geographical area with high unemployment or in remote areas or small cities, (as opposed to living in medium sized or large cities), increases the chance of being an Early School Leaver.*
- Findings in relation to the number of parents in the home and the number of siblings are inconclusive.*
- Family practices such as low parental involvement in their child's schooling, poor parental aspirations, parenting style and parents' language patterns are all seen to increase the risk of Early School Leaving.*
- Students with higher levels of congruence across social systems can be expected to experience greater success at school.*
- Other factors such as the 'push-pull' factors of the labour market for low skilled which may be either a necessity or a choice for the young person also feature.*
- Daily stressors including the family financial situation has a strong and direct influence on Early School Leaving.*

1.5 School and Systemic Factors

As outlined above, although student and family characteristics can explain most of the variability in student achievement, about 20% of the variability in student outcomes can be attributed to the characteristics of the schools that students attend (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Eivers et al., (2000) considers these school factors to be the most significant and best screening predictive factor of Early School Leaving. Factors related to schools can be ordered into two main categories: School Structure and School Practices.

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement		
		Persistence		
		Attainment		
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic	
			Social	
		Anti-Social Tendency		
	Attitudes			
	Social Background	Past Experiences		
		Health		
		Family	Demographics	
			Status and Structure	
			Practices	
			Resources	
School and Systemic Factors	School Structure	Sector		
		Composition		
		Size		
		Location		
	School Practices	Cultural Reproduction	School Management	
		Early Tracking	Curriculum and Syllabus	
		Grade Retention/Repetition	Pedagogy	
		Classes	Teachers	
		Ability Grouping/Streaming	Language of Schooling	
		Difficulty with Transitions	Early Childcare Education and Care	
		Guidance	Vocational Education and Training	
		School Climate		

Figure 22: Elements of *School and Systemic Factors*

1.5.1 School Structure

School structure will be investigated using the following domains: Sector, Composition, Size and Location.

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
Status and Structure			
Practices			
Resources			

School and Systemic Factors	School Structure	Sector	
		Composition	
		Size	
		Location	
	School Practices	Cultural Reproduction	School Management
		Early Tracking	Curriculum and Syllabus
		Grade Retention/Repetition	Pedagogy
		Classes	Teachers
		Ability Grouping/Streaming	Language of Schooling
		Difficulty with Transitions	Early Childcare Education and Care
		Guidance	Vocational Education and Training
		School Climate	

Figure 23: Positioning of ***School Structure*** within *School and Systemic Factors*

1.5.1.1 Sector

Research has indicated differences by school sector and by school composition in early leaving rates. In the U.S. substantial differences in Early School Leaving rates have been found between public and Catholic schools. Even

when controlling for student characteristics, Early School Leaving is substantially less in Catholic schools than in public schools (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987; Bryk and Thum, 1989; Rumberger, 1995). Similarly, research suggests that Early School Leaving is generally higher in public than in private schools (MacIver and MacIver, 2009). In the UK, Cheng's (1995) study suggests lower Early School Leaving rates in single-sex schools. In Ireland, 3.9% of all students enrolled in DEIS schools in 2009/10 left school before enrolling in the final year of the senior cycle. This compares to 2.1% of students enrolled in non-DEIS schools. Only 1% of students who were taught all subjects through Irish were Early School Leavers, whereas 2.5% of students who were taught no subjects through Irish were Early Leavers (DES, 2013). When figures are adjusted to consider the numbers of students who leave fee charging second level schools to repeat the Leaving Certificate elsewhere and most notably in a grind school, the vocational sector accounts for the highest number of students leaving school early: second level fee-charging 3.8%; second level non-fee charging 2.1%; vocational 3%; community 2.2%; comprehensive 1.4% (DES, 2013; Smyth, 1999). Overall retention rate comparisons between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, indicate a Leaving Certificate retention rate of 82.09% in DEIS schools compared with a 92.63% rate in non-DEIS schools (DES, 2015).

1.5.1.2 Composition

In most OECD countries, the effect of the average socioeconomic status of students in a particular school largely outweighs the effects of the individual student's socioeconomic status (OECD 2007). Studies have focused on the social composition of the school, finding that a concentration of students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds is associated with higher rates of Early School Leaving for all students (Kerckhoff, 1986; Ryan, 1999; Ayalon, 1994; Goldsmith, 2003; Foskett et al., 2007). Rumberger and Lim (2008) found that mean socioeconomic status, the proportion of at risk students, the proportion of ethnic or linguistic minorities, and the proportion of students who changed schools or residences, as well as the proportion of students from non-traditional families was correlated to Early School Leaving rates. Traag and van

der Velden (2008) support this claim, as student composition in the Netherlands seems to have an effect on Early School Leaving. In the Netherlands, decreasing the share of minority students in a school by 10% leads to a 13% lesser risk of Early School Leaving. However, after controlling for resources and school practices, Rumberger and Lim (2008) found that the composition variables became insignificant showing that school practices can have a positive effect on countering the negative effects of student composition.

In Ireland, Byrne and Smith (2010) indicate lower rates of Early School Leaving in mixed and middle class schools. In the Irish context, studies support the view that the social mix of the school has an impact on student retention (Smyth, 1999; McCoy, 2000; Byrne, 2008). Smyth (1999) found that the social class composition of a school has a significant impact on potential Early School Leaving, with higher rates reported in predominantly lower socioeconomic status than higher socioeconomic status schools, even controlling for the individual social background of students. Early School Leaving is seen to be concentrated in schools with higher intake of students from lower socioeconomic status (European Parliament, 2011). A mix of students from different backgrounds in schools can be beneficial for all students, in particular for those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those whose parents have a low level of education. However, socioeconomic issues are often the main cause of segregation in education, and frequently interplay with other factors such as racial or ethnic background (migrant or minority status) (European Parliament, 2011). Segregation in education can occur for different reasons. On the one hand, it can be due to selection in the education system. Student assessment which does not take sufficient account of disadvantaged or migrant backgrounds may lead to these students being over-represented in disadvantaged schools or even their referral to special education (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2009). On the other hand, the social segregation of schools may result from the tendency of different social groups to live in different areas (OECD, 2007).

Irrespective of the reason, socioeconomic segregation has been shown to be problematic in many ways. School systems with a high level of segregation

have worse educational achievement results (OECD, 2007). Furthermore, more behavioural problems can be found in schools where socioeconomically disadvantaged students are concentrated (Hugh, 2010). Consequently, the risk of students leaving school early is considerably higher in these schools (Lyche, 2010; Traag and van der Velden, 2011; Nevala et al., 2013). The effect of socioeconomic segregation on the composition of the student population in a school is, in fact, so powerful that even an average student is more likely to leave school early than from a school that has high levels of Early School Leaving than from a school that has more moderate Early School Leaving rates (Audas and Willms, 2001).

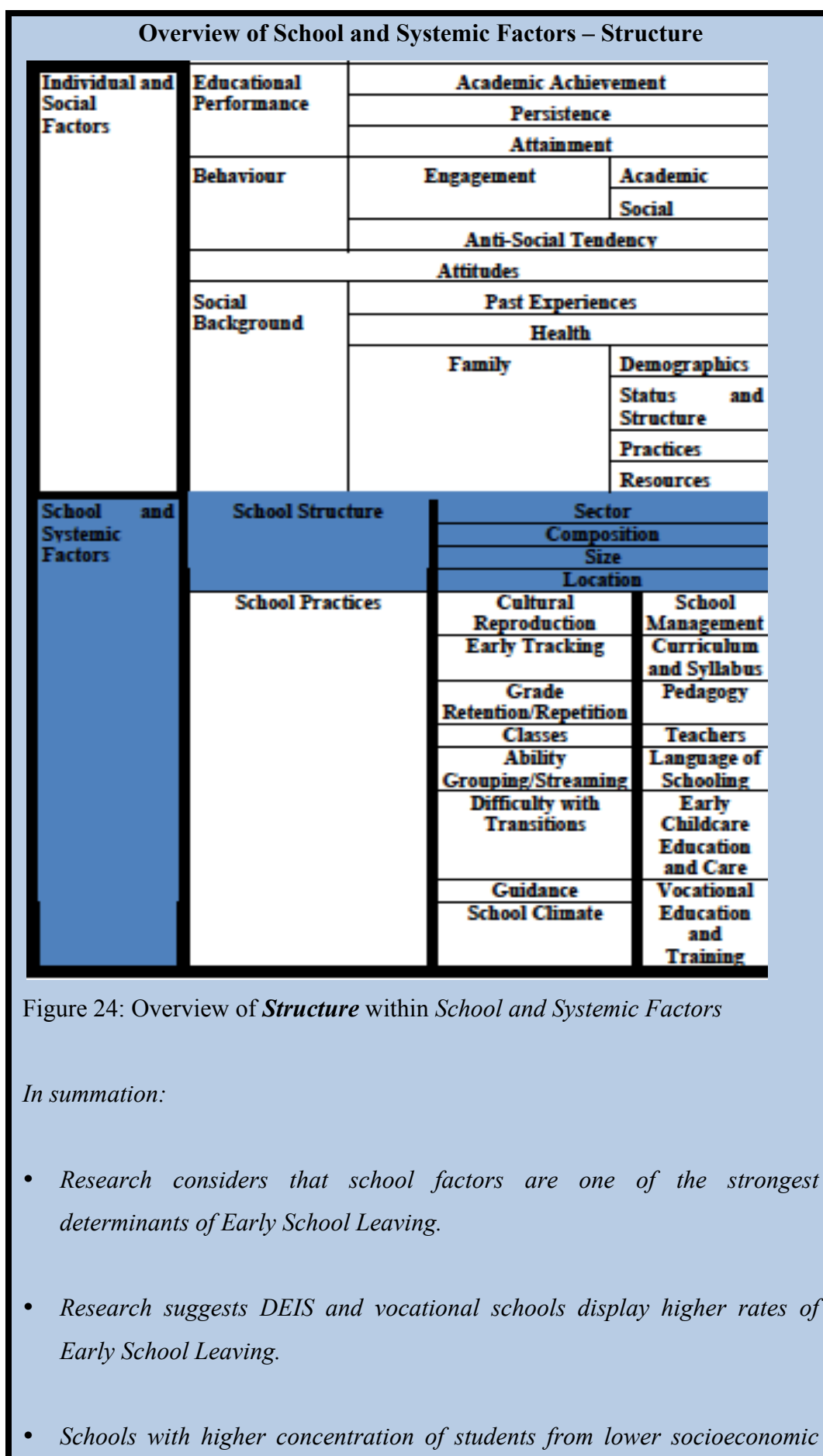
1.5.1.3 Size

Researchers have studied whether the size of a school has an impact on Early School Leaving, with mixed results. Evidence in the U.S. indicates that school size can influence the educational attainment of children for good or for bad. Studies have found that in smaller schools there tended to be a culture of teachers holding more positive attitudes towards their students and having a greater sense of responsibility and care for their students, (possibly linked with higher student expectations), which were also found to have a positive and beneficial influence on student participation, retention and learning (see Lee and Loeb, 2000; Lee and Burkham, 2003). Further U.S. research has found that smaller schools tend to have lower Early School Leaving rates than larger schools, possibly because of greater opportunities for informal face-to-face interaction between teachers and students (Cotton, 1996). This may be however due to difference in average school size between Ireland and the U.S. (where the majority of Irish schools have an enrolment of 300-600, the majority of US schools' enrolments frequently exceed 2,000) (Eivers et al., 2010). It is sometimes assumed that lowering the student-teacher ratio will have a positive effect on completion. However, studies show that there is no correlation between class size and Early School Leaving in upper second level, although reducing the size of primary school classes does seem to have a positive effect on the outcome (Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

1.5.1.4 Location

The location of the school, whether in an urban or suburban area does not seem to have a significant effect (Rumberger and Lim, 2008) though rates of Early School Leaving are higher in remote areas and in small cities (as opposed to medium or large cities). Marks' (2007) work from Australia indicates that those in rural regions have a higher rate of Early School Leaving. This was once the case in Ireland, however, retention rates in rural Ireland have improved in recent years with the highest levels of Early School Leaving now associated with cities.

As evidenced above, school structures can contribute to and even promote Early School Leaving. However, school structure is informed and animated by other, largely human effects (Smyth, 1998), which can be evidenced in School Practices.



backgrounds display higher rates of Early School Leaving.

- *There is some evidence to suggest that larger schools have higher levels of Early School Leaving, though this is not conclusive.*
- *Research suggests that rates of Early School Leaving are greater in small as opposed to medium or large cities.*

1.5.2 School Practices

School and Systemic Factors	School Structure	Sector	
		Composition	
		Size	
		Location	
	School Practices	Cultural Reproduction	School Management
		Early Tracking	Curriculum and Syllabus
		Grade Retention/Repetition	Pedagogy
		Classes	Teachers
		Ability Grouping/Streaming	Language of Schooling
		Difficulty with Transitions	Early Childcare Education and Care
		Guidance	Vocational Education and Training
		School Climate	

Figure 25: Positioning of *School Practices* with *School and Systemic Factors*

1.5.2.1 Cultural Reproduction

The role of the school in cultural reproduction has been discussed in detail above.

1.5.2.2 Early Tracking

The term ‘early tracking’ refers to situations in which learners and their families are required to make obligatory choices between different educational

tracks at an early age (European Commission, 2015). The differentiation of students into separate tracks or ability groups is found to contribute to Early School Leaving (Berends, 1995; Byrk and Thum, 1989). Separating students into different educational tracks or pathways on the basis of their achievement is another common practice in many European countries. This usually results in students being guided towards either academic or vocational programmes, which ultimately lead to different educational and career prospects. Those in favour of tracking suggest that students learn better in homogeneous classrooms that follow a curriculum and instruction appropriate to their abilities. However, research shows that separating students too early has a strong negative impact on those placed in tracks that do not correspond to their potential and/or aspirations (Hattie, 2009). It appears to increase differences and inequalities in student achievement (Hanuschek and Wößmann, 2006; OECD, 2013).

Disadvantaged students, such as those from migrant or minority backgrounds, are particularly affected by early tracking as they are frequently placed in the least academically oriented tracks at an early stage i.e. before they have had the opportunity to develop the linguistic, social and cultural skills to reach their potential (Spinath and Spinath, 2005; OECD, 2010). In combination with a rigid education system offering limited permeability of educational pathways, students with lower academic performance may, consequently, lose the motivation to remain in education and training (European Parliament, 2011).

Early tracking can trigger a vicious cycle in teachers' and students' expectations. Teachers can have lower expectations of low-performing students; and students consequently adjust their expectations and efforts (OECD, 2010). Moreover, students cease to benefit from the positive influence of being around their more advanced peers (Hanuschek and Wößmann, 2006; Rumberger and Lim, 2008).

Finally, more experienced and competent teachers tend to teach in more academic education institutions (OECD, 2010). As a result, students who find themselves in a wrong track often experience a negative learning experience; they may also experience stigmatisation, a decrease in their self-esteem and

motivation, and thus run a higher risk of early leaving from education and training (European Commission, 2013). Early tracking takes place in Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland.

1.5.2.3 Grade Retention/Repetition

Grade retention describes the process of holding students back to repeat a year when they are considered not to have made sufficient progress. The assumption is that repeating a year gives them the opportunity to acquire the knowledge they need to continue their school career successfully. In Europe, grade retention is possible according to existing regulations in the majority of education systems, even though in many countries it is rarely applied (EACEA/Eurydice, 2014). However, grade retention does not necessarily improve academic performance. On the contrary, research results have consistently highlighted the negative effects of grade retention. They provide, in particular, evidence of the detrimental effects of grade retention on students' academic, socioemotional and behavioural outcomes, which further increase the risk of poor performance and in many cases may lead to them to leave school prematurely (see Thompson and Cunningham, 2000; Jimerson, 2001; Silbergliitt et al., 2006; Jacob and Lefgren, 2009).

Research continues to show that those who are retained at a grade level, (repeat a year), are most likely to become Early School Leavers (Alexander et al., 1997; Rumberger, 1995; Wehlage and Rutter, 1986). Rumberger and Lim (2008) review some empirical evidence on the relationship between retention and probability of graduating from high school. The majority of the studies reviewed suggest that retention in elementary and/or middle school was associated with an increase in the odds of Early School Leaving. High school repetition, however, did not seem to have any significant effects on Early School Leaving probability. In Colombia, over-age students, who are often grade repeaters, are more likely to leave school early even at the very early stage of their educational career in primary school (Garcia-Jaramillo et al., 2011). In Spain, students who repeat a grade show higher rates of early leaving than students who are given additional tuition and support in order to avoid

repetition. Research based on the experiences of 856 early leavers revealed that 88% left school due to their experiences of grade repetition (Mena Martínez et al., 2010).

A systematic review of seventeen studies examining factors associated with leaving second level school prior to graduation confirms that grade retention is, in fact, a significant predictor of school dropout (Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple, 2002). It is perceived by students as an extremely stressful life-event, which negatively affects their self-esteem (Anderson, Jimerson and Whipple, 2005) and thus, increases school failure, high-risk behaviour and the likelihood of leaving early (Field, Kuczera and Pont, 2007; Rumberger and Lim, 2008). Likewise, longitudinal studies reveal that grade retention is linked to an increased risk of leaving school (Jimerson et al., 2002; Allensworth, 2005), together with student level variables such as low self-esteem, problematic behaviour, low academic achievement as well as family level variables such as lower maternal educational attainment and lower maternal value of education (Jimerson et al., 2002). Grade retention may harm especially those low achieving students who are already most at risk of failure (Jacob and Lefgren, 2009). As the proportion of students who fall behind as a result of grade retention is higher for those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, repeating a year therefore also widens social inequities (OECD, 2013).

According to the OECD's 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data, the largest proportion of students reporting that they had repeated a grade in primary, lower second level or upper second level school can be found in Belgium (36.1%), with the lowest rates of grade repetition (below 3%), are Croatia, Lithuania, the United Kingdom and Iceland. The rate of grade retention in Norway is nil. A Spanish survey of Early School Leavers found that nearly 9 out of 10 dropped out due to their experiences of repeating a year (Mena Martínez, et. al., 2009). The results of Ikeda and García (2014), show that this distinction between grade repetitions at primary and at second level education levels is important, because the extent of the relationship between grade repetition and educational outcomes differs according to whether students have repeated a grade in primary or second level

school. In most countries examined, students who repeated a grade in second level school tend to perform better than do students who repeated a grade in primary school, and non-repeaters tend to perform even better than second level school repeaters. In terms of the association between grade repetition and a measure of non-cognitive skills provided by PISA, (the attitudes towards school index), the results show a more complex picture and the relationships vary across countries. In about one third of countries and economies, primary school repeaters tend to report more positive attitudes towards schools than do second level school repeaters. In thirteen countries and economies, non-repeaters tend to report more positive attitudes than do primary school repeaters. In about two thirds of countries and economies examined, non-repeaters report more positive attitudes towards school than do second level school repeaters. This study also looked at the interaction between grade repetition and student socioeconomic background and suggests differences in the relationships between repeaters and non-repeaters depending on their socioeconomic background. In eighteen countries and economies, the performance difference between non-repeaters and second level school repeaters is greater for socioeconomically advantaged students than for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. This may imply that for socioeconomically advantaged students, whether a student repeated a grade in second level school or not is mainly determined by their academic ability, while for socioeconomically disadvantaged students, it is determined by other factors in addition to their academic ability.

1.5.2.4 Classes

The general organisation of schooling into classes, while not thought to be directly causal of Early School Leaving, facilitates the detachment of children who are less school-ready, less motivated, less able or more troubled (Stokes, 2003). As Cusick (1973:214) comments, school organisation ‘provides an enormous amount of time when students are actually required to do little other than be in attendance and minimally compliant’. It is often argued that smaller classes, (whether streamed or not), will alleviate Early School Leaving (for example, INTO, 1995); this is not proven by the literature. Indeed, small remedial classes may themselves be a causal factor in early leaving, being

stigmatised as ‘relegation’ classes, as McDevitt (1998) notes regarding the experience in France where, as a consequence, ‘the use of remedial streams has been discouraged and reduced’. In Eivers et al.’s (2000) study, almost one quarter of Early School Leavers in her study had been assigned to remedial classes upon entry to post primary school. Of the remainder, 71% were assigned to ability groups and 21.1% to mixed ability classes. It should be noted that practices vary in relation to assignment of students to classes with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (1999) finding that disadvantaged schools were twice as likely as non-disadvantaged schools to organise classes on the basis of performance on aptitude tests.

1.5.2.5 Ability Grouping/Streaming

Figures from Byrne and Smyth’s (2010) study show dramatic differences in Early School Leaving rates by class allocation policy. Those in mixed ability classes were least likely to leave school early (7%), while the highest leaving rates were found among those who had been allocated to a lower stream class (60%). As discussed above, analyses has shown that lower reading and maths scores on entry to post-primary education were associated with a greater risk of Early School Leaving (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). It is important, therefore, to take account of the possible effect of ability grouping net of initial academic ability. It is clear that, even controlling for initial ability, significant differences are evident across different class types, with those in the lower stream having higher drop-out rates than students of similar ability levels allocated to other classes. Students in lower stream classes are thirteen times more likely than students in mixed ability classes to leave school early (Byrne and Smyth, 2010).

According to the literature, streaming has a strong negative impact on grades and examination performance among those allocated to lower grade classes and has a negative effect on levels of Early School Leaving in the first three years of post-primary school; has significant polarisation effects, and tends to create greater inequalities between students at the ends of the ability and lower socioeconomic status continuum; reinforces and perpetuates the relationship between socioeconomic background and educational achievement (See Bryk

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

When students were allocated to ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ ability classes for all of their Junior Cycle subjects, resulted in significantly lower Leaving Certificate grades for students in lower stream classes, without any corresponding achievement gain for those in higher stream classes (Smyth et al., 2011). The longer term impact of streaming on academic outcomes would appear to reflect restricted access to higher level subjects among those in lower stream classes as well as a climate of lower expectations emerging in these class contexts. It is noteworthy that, contrary to the rationale for utilising streaming, students assigned to higher stream classes achieve no academic advantage over those in mixed ability base classes.

It is contended that streaming or ability grouping contributes to Early School Leaving (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Streaming is linked to lower teacher expectations and separation from other students results in disengagement and alienation from the learning process (Byrne and Smyth, 2010).

1.5.2.6 Difficulty with Transitions

Key transition points, (primary to post-primary, lower second level to upper second level), are critical for potential Early School Leavers (European Parliament, 2011). For example, at the beginning of first year, Early School Leavers are more likely to report feeling isolated or anxious than other students. However, no such difference is evident at later time-points (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Lack of guidance during these periods can also exacerbate Early School Leaving tendencies. Guidance is used as protective factor across European countries. Initiatives in many countries focus on education and career guidance as a measure to facilitate transitions. The Education Council highlighted in 2011 that strengthening guidance and counselling supports students in their career choices and in complex transitions within education or from education to employment. Special attention is given to guidance in some countries when students have to move from one stage of education to another and face

challenges linked to these changes.

1.5.2.7 Guidance

The adequacy of support services in schools such as guidance and counselling is highlighted in the literature (Banks, 1994; NESF, 1997; Watts 2002) as a protective measure against Early School Leaving. The consequence of the absence of such supports most especially at times of difficult transitions has been outlined above.

1.5.2.8 School Climate

Smyth and Hattam (2002: 375) focus on the school culture and argue that the ‘cultural geography’ of the school has an important effect on student engagement.

1.5.2.8.1 School Ethos and Expectations

A positive academic climate within the school promotes higher attendance rates and retention within the schooling system. Students perform better in examinations where teachers expect them to continue in full-time education (Bryk and Thum, 1989; Smyth, 1998). The reverse is also true. Reporting on the outcomes of a range of pilot projects across Europe, the European Commission (2000a) comments that ‘young people do not persist with a regime that rejects them. They react by dropping out’. Smyth and Hattam (2002) identify three kinds of school culture which can contribute to early leaving. Firstly, an aggressive school culture is characterised by hierarchical relations between teachers and students, with those who speak out being deemed ‘troublemakers’. In contrast, a passive school culture may be ‘pleasant’ in terms of social relations but fails to engage students with curriculum and learning. Finally, the active culture embraces a pedagogy of respect, of actively reaching out to students, of mutual trust between teachers and students and valuing of student voice. Aspects from each culture may co-exist in any one school. The active culture is the most conducive to learning. However, most schools tend to

operate along a passive/aggressive dichotomy (Smyth and Hattam, 2002).

1.5.2.8.2 Inclusiveness

Research shows greater retention in schools where there is a positive school climate with good relationships between teachers and students and a greater sense of ownership on the part of the students in terms of school life. Malone and McCoy (2003) highlight the importance of care in the life of the school, with disciplinary issues often contributing to the breakdown of relationships between teachers and students. However, their work highlighted how parental and student involvement facilitates school completion and is reminiscent of previous discussions of congruence between ecosystems in the child's life the degree to which schools involve parents and young people in their organisation of policy and activity. Those that do, especially if they offer a pleasant environment and support structures for teachers, have lower rates of Early School Leaving (Rutter et al., 1976, 1981; Rutter et. al, 1979; Learchmouth, 1995; Smyth, 1998). Smyth (1998) sees this as an 'inclusive' school atmosphere.

Many authors highlight the centrality of disaffection with school in Early School Leaving, resulting from both social and institutional factors including the influence of peers, relationships with teachers, curriculum content and classroom context (see Kinder et al., 1996; Archer and Yamashita, 2003).

1.5.2.8.3 Code of Discipline

A 'strict but fair' disciplinary climate also contributes to student retention (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Schools that are effective in retaining young people have clear guidelines for discipline with an emphasis on encouragement rather than punishment (Rutter et. al., 1979; Smyth, 1998). The school's disciplinary climate is often cited as an influence by Early School Leavers themselves (see Boldt, 1994).

1.5.2.9 School Management

The manner in which schools are managed is related to Early School Leaving. Schools in which the principal offers leadership, but involves staff in decision making and setting goals are more effective (Purkey and Smith, 1983). School based staff development, the manner in which new teachers are inducted, and the rate of staff turnover are linked to achievement, truancy and Early School Leaving (Cheng, 1995; Purkey and Smith, 1983). Schools in which students are formally involved in decision-making such as through a students' council or prefect systems, have been found to have lower rates of Early School Leaving (Smyth, 1999).

1.5.2.10 Curriculum and Syllabus

Considerable work has been done in relation to the mismatch that can occur between some students and the curriculum and teaching methods utilised in schools. Syllabus connotes the subjects as well as the topics covered in the course of study. On the other hand, curriculum implies the chapters and academic content taught in school. It alludes to the knowledge, skills and competencies students should learn during study. Fleming and Kenny (1998) point out, that school operates on the basis that it is a bounded system, and that 'everyone who arrives at the door must agree to work according to the rules of the system'. Stokes (1995) discusses the significant detachment that takes place in post primary schools due to "the way in which learning is structured in the post primary school, and the young person's changing relationships with, for example, the curriculum...and teachers" (see also Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Eurydice, 1994; Boldt, 1994, 1997; Goleman, 1996). Drudy and Lynch (1993:158) consider that the curriculum is structured in a way that is disadvantageous to working class children. In keeping with previous discussions, Drudy and Lynch (1993) conclude that 'the curriculum...is another mechanism through which social and educational inequality is perpetuated'. Researchers continue to discuss issues of relevancy in relation to curriculum and syllabi. According to McCombs and Pope (1994, cited in Budge et al, 2000:29), '...individuals are naturally motivated to learn when... they perceive

what they are learning as being personally meaningful and relevant'. Half of the school leavers in Eivers et al.'s (2000) study thought that what they had learnt in school would not be useful in the workplace (see also Natriello, 1982), highlighting the view that schooling may be perceived as less relevant when students do not make a connection between academic work and future economic prospects.

The Combat Poverty Agency (2003) has listed the failure of school curricula to reflect and validate the cultural backgrounds and learning preferences of all learners as one of the factors causing educational disadvantage. Similarly, the Summary Report of Working Groups at the 2002 Educational Disadvantage Forum (CPA, 2003: 20) points to a certain mismatch of values between teachers and the communities in which they work. The Report (2002:15) highlights how school organisation, the curriculum and examinations-based assessment system 'can actively alienate learners, reinforcing disadvantage and creating a sense of failure and marginalisation that can have serious consequences for individuals and society'.

A study conducted by McSorley et al. (1999) outlines the ramifications of this, highlighting that the content of the curriculum is considered to be unattractive and irrelevant to lower socioeconomic status students (see Bartlett, 2011). Fagan's (1995: 100) findings are very similar. She points out that the education system completely fails to reflect the reality of students from poorer families. Fagan (1995) clearly indicates that those from lower socioeconomic status families are not the 'definers' of what is culturally and therefore, educationally, valuable. Thus,

...by not using the life experience of the young people as a basis from which to educate, and by not linking the background of the young people to the curriculum, the curriculum is irrelevant and meaningless (Fagan, 1995: 100)

The result is a potentially high level of conflict between students and teachers and also between families and teachers (Tovey and Share, 2003). Smyth (1999) goes so far as to suggest that the social context of the school has additional effects on student outcomes over and above a student's background.

1.5.2.11 Pedagogy

Pedagogy is the method and practice of teaching and includes teaching methodologies. In recent decades, it has become apparent that we live and teach in an increasingly pluralistic society, yet in many cases, schools continue to operate a decidedly monolithic environment in the classroom (Heeran Flynn, 2013). Inclusive teaching and learning methods can be used in an attempt to redress this balance. Such inclusive methods are student-centred. Various theories put forth how children learn and indicate how students have different learning preferences. Teachers' teaching styles can be mismatched to the students' preferred learning preference.

1.5.2.12 Teachers

1.5.2.12.1 Teacher-Student Relationships

Teachers are considered the face of the education system (Stokes, 2003). For many, the most important element of successful programmes with troubled teenagers is the quality of the relationships between adults and young people (see also Levering, 2000; Cullen, 2000a, 2000b; Budge et al., 2000). Rutter et al. (1979), Bryk and Thum (1980) and Smyth (1998) report that rates of absenteeism and Early School Leaving are higher where students have a negative experience of interaction with teachers and lower where interaction is positive. Where this relationship breaks down, the young people are more likely to leave school early. Early School Leavers' dislike of school results from perceived ill-treatment by one or more teachers or lack of respect for poor teachers (Boldt, 1994, Mayock, 2000). Where dislike of a subject is cited, this also is often associated with a particular teacher (European Social Fund, 1996). But the reverse is also true (Stokes, 1995; Cullen, 2000a). Boldt (1994) found that the young people could usually identify one teacher they liked, who could control the class and who made the subject interesting. In O'Sullivan's (1998) study, 49% of respondents said that they would stay on in school if they could work with a teacher they liked. This is consistent with findings by Rutter et al. (1979) and others that high expectations regarding work and behaviour elicit

positive responses from the young people.

1.5.2.12.2 Teacher Expectations and Cultural Bias

Neither teachers nor schools are culturally neutral. Neither is the curriculum. The Eurydice Report (1994: 55) summarises this perspective as follows:

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

Cultural bias can lower a teacher's expectations of students from different social or ethnic backgrounds and these lower expectations are fulfilled in lower academic performance and earlier exit from the education system. Brierley (1980) argues that if a child is socially or culturally deprived, or if s/he is underestimated by teachers at school, then s/he is likely to make poor progress.

Students under-perform where teachers are perceived to be disinterested in students or are constantly giving out to them. According to Budge et al (2000:31), 'the basic message that has emerged from many studies is that students expect to learn if their teachers expect them to learn'. Lower teacher expectations can begin a vicious cycle where a student's own self-belief is damaged (European Commission, 2000: 6).

This is related to the phenomenon identified by psychologists as 'learned helplessness'. The term is used to characterise a learned state of helplessness produced by exposure to 'unpleasant situations in which there is no possibility of escape or avoidance' (Reber, 1985). A learned inhibition is associated with Early School Leaving and may, indeed, be a watermark of the failure of the school's relationship with the young person. But causal processes are not suggested as such (Stokes, 2003). Similarly, subject levels taken are not simply a result of choice, but the long-term outcome of the interaction between school policy and practice, teacher expectations and student aspirations leading to

further restricted choices by students.

Research has indicated that teachers can have depressed expectations of students in disadvantaged settings (see Creegan, 2008; ESRI, 2010; Heeran Flynn, 2013). Cregan's (2008a: 181-5) study revealed that teachers' perceptions of their students' oral and literacy skills in designated disadvantaged schools in the majority of cases, were very negative, describing their language as 'poor' and 'weak'. The poor language skills of the children was attributed to the types of language experiences in the home, parents' lack of education, and different priorities for parents. Cregan (2008a) suggested that the teachers' poor perceptions of children's oral language and literacy skills may result in lower expectations for these children. Cultural bias and expectations, (or lack thereof), on the part of teachers and communities may both generally influence and cause Early School Leaving (Stokes, 2003).

1.5.2.13 Language of Schooling

Language can be seen to be a key mechanism for the expression and application of cultural bias. Stubbs (1983) argues that all educational failure is linguistic failure. Linguistic discontinuity between the home and the school is considered to be a major factors associated with educational failure (Mac Ruairc, 1998).

Bearing in mind that it is the formal elaborated code of standard English which is the language code that is used in schools (see Tosi, 2001), it is evident that communicative ability in standard English is essential in order to derive maximum benefit from the school system. As discussed above, the child is socialised into the language of the home and it is the language of the home, together with the culture of the home that the child takes to school (Bernstein, 1971). As a result, Epstein (2008:4) attests "[h]owever configured, however constrained, families come with their children to school".

Schleppegrell (2004) comments that all children enter school with language resources that have served them well in learning at home and that have enabled them to be interactive and successful members of their families and local

communities. She is clear that the variety of English expected at school differs from the interactional language that students draw on for social purposes outside of school, with the following result

For the majority of children, starting school means confronting new ways of using language...Some children's ways of making meaning with language enable them to readily respond to the school's expectations, but the ways of using language of other students do not...many children lack experience in making the kinds of meaning that are expected at school...This lack of experience makes it difficult for these students to learn to demonstrate their learning (Schleppegrell, 2004:21-22)

For some children, the socialisation contexts in which they have participated have prepared them well for the use of language they encounter in school. For many other children, this is not necessarily the case.

School is an institution of the state which functions through the medium of standard language and considers the teaching of the standard language to all as one of its first and most fundamental tasks (Cregan, 2008a). As evident from the above discussions, for some children, this task may be complicated by the fact that the spoken language of the home may not necessarily be the standard language of the school (see Schleppegrell, 2001, 2004; Spolsky, 1998; Vernon-Feagans, 1996; Wolfram et al., 1999).

Schleppegrell's (2004) research highlights the discontinuity experienced by some children when attempting to access the school system due to a mismatch in terms of language experience. The research also indicates that the language of these children is judged negatively, and that sometimes their cognitive abilities are misjudged on the basis of their language variety, leading to feelings of inadequacy and failure to achieve their potential. Considering the situation from an Irish perspective, research by MacRuairc (1997: 70) supports this view, highlighting that

The school manages the linguistic norm by imposing the socially recognised criteria of linguistic correctness. The degree of harmony between the language variety valued by the school and the language variety of the child is central at this point. Children from dominant classes find education intelligible. A feeling of

marginality develops among those whose culture and language variety are not in accordance with that of the dominant group.

Edwards (1997) argues that what are in effect differences not deficits in terms of language variety lead to disadvantage and discontinuity for these children in relation to accessing the education system, resulting in underachievement. Vernon-Feagans et al. (2002: 193) characterise the current situation in terms of a 'poor fit', which is for many of the children created by the schools and the larger society. For Lynch (2001a: 252):

...while distributing more education to those groups who want it is crucial, it may also be necessary to change the education system itself to take account of the differences which various groups bring to that system. Schooling needs to recognise and respect difference if it is to treat all people with equality of respect. It cannot assume that all people will fit the one mould.

Research findings are therefore, unequivocal in establishing that there is a difference between the language of the home and the linguistic knowledge demanded by the school (see Anrade, 2011; Gamble and Reedy, 2011). Evidence also points clearly to the link between this difference in language variety and socioeconomic status, indicating that the language demands of the school much more closely approximate standard language use, the variety most familiar to middle socioeconomic status children (see Bernstein, 2009; Petkova and Kersaint, 2010).

The education system is based on a certain type of language which disadvantaged children must be 'initiated' into, something in which they have no direct experience, in order to succeed

All teaching...implicitly presupposes a body of knowledge, skills, and above all, modes of expression which constitute the heritage of the cultivated classes...it can only lead to a fundamental inequality in this game reserved for privileged persons...(Bourdieu and Passerson, 1979: 56)

1.5.2.14 Early Childhood Education and Care

From earlier discussions, limited provision of early childhood education and

care (European Parliament, 2011; European Commission, 2015) is seen to have an effect on the school readiness of a child. As discussed above, this can lead to further educational disadvantages once the child starts school.

1.5.2.15 Vocational Education and Training

Lack of quality vocational education and training (VET) and alternative routes of educational provision leave less academic students with very little alternative choice (European Parliament, 2011; European Commission, 2015).

Overview of School and Systemic Factors - Practices				
Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement		
		Persistence		
		Attainment		
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic	
			Social	
		Anti-Social Tendency		
	Attitudes			
	Social Background	Past Experiences		
		Health		
		Family	Demographics	
Status and Structure				
Practices				
Resources				
School and Systemic Factors	School Structure	Sector		
		Composition		
		Size		
		Location		
	School Practices	Cultural Reproduction	School Management	
		Early Tracking	Curriculum and Syllabus	
		Grade Retention/Repetition	Pedagogy	
		Classes	Teachers	
		Ability Grouping/Streaming	Language of Schooling	
		Difficulty with Transitions	Early Childcare Education and Care	
		Guidance	Vocational Education and Training	
		School Climate		

Figure 26: Overview of *School Practices* within School and Systemic Factors

In summation:

- A school’s role in cultural reproduction can mean that a child is disadvantaged once s/he begins school, if the cultural (and linguistic) capital which s/he brings to school is different to the schooling system’s which is predicated on middle class norms.*
- Early Tracking has a significant effect on Early School Leaving Rates.*

Figure 26: Overview of *School Practices* within School and Systemic Factors

In summation:

- *A school's role in cultural reproduction can mean that a child is disadvantaged once s/he begins school, if the cultural (and linguistic) capital which s/he brings to school is different to the schooling system's which is predicated on middle class norms.*
- *Early Tracking has a significant effect on Early School Leaving Rates.*

- *Grade retention is considered a significant predictor of Early School Leaving. Research shows that those who are retained at a grade level are those most likely to be Early School Leavers. Retention at primary school appears to have a greater impact than retention at second level.*
- *Small, remedial classes are thought to be causal factor in Early School Leaving.*
- *Significant numbers of Early School Leavers leave from lower stream classes, where streaming is seen to have an impact on Early School Leaving, especially in the first three years of post primary education.*
- *Difficulty with transitions is considered to be associated with Early School Leaving. The beginning of First Year is indicated by the research as a period where students have most difficulty with transition. Lack of supports or guidance at this juncture is seen to increase risks of Early School Leaving.*
- *A positive academic climate with a school promotes higher attendance rates and lower Early School Leaving rates, where an 'active' culture is considered most conducive to higher retention rates.*
- *Research shows greater retention in schools where there is a positive school climate with good relationships between teachers and students and a greater sense of ownership on the part of the student in terms of school life.*
- *A 'strict but fair' disciplinary code contributes to higher retention rates.*
- *Schools with school-based development for teachers, orientation for new teachers and lower turnover rates in terms of staff have higher retention rates.*
- *Schools where students participate in decision-making process through*

prefects and School Councils have higher retention rates.

- *Issues with the relevancy of the curriculum, the type of teaching, learning and assessment methods used the school, relationships with teachers, the language used in the school, availability of preschool education and options such as vocational education and training have an effect on Early School Leaving rates.*
- *Positive teacher-student relationships and high teacher expectations serve to protect against Early School Leaving.*

Individual and Social Factors	Educational Performance	Academic Achievement	
		Persistence	
		Attainment	
	Behaviour	Engagement	Academic
			Social
		Anti-Social Tendency	
	Attitudes		
	Social Background	Past Experiences	
		Health	
		Family	Demographics
			Status and Structure
			Practices
			Resources
School and Systemic Factors	School Structure		
	School Practices		

Figure 27: Summary of Early School Leaving Predictive Risk Factors

1.6 Conclusion

The complexity of the above discussion has illustrated that there is no one cause of Early School Leaving, thus, any attempt to target those potentially at risk of Early School Leaving must address a range of possible risks that can be organised under the headings of *Individual and Social Factors* and *School and Systemic Factors*. Research indicates that it is misleading to focus on one risk factor; rather Early School Leaving must be viewed holistically. Risk factors should be conceptualised from an Ecological Systems perspective and as such, risks are seen as a set of interrelated set of factors stretching across the individual's ecological systems. It is the dynamics across each system and the interplay between them that must be understood. As evidenced in the literature, Early School Leaving is not a fixed concept; it is a process of disengagement, brought about by a constellation of difficulties. The more risk factors that an individual is exposed to, the greater the vulnerability of the individual. Though Early School Leavers are a heterogeneous group and reasons for leaving education early are highly individual, overarching general influences are apparent and these patterns can be used to effectively target potential Early School Leavers.

Addendum: Identifying Early School Leavers

Attempts to predict Early School Leaving at the level of the individual have had mixed success.

Not all variables that distinguish Early School Leavers can be included in a template for use in identifying Early School Leavers. For efficiency of use, only a limited number of variables can be included, and these variables need to be easily quantifiable for those who will depend on utilising a template.

In Eivers et al.'s (2000) selection of variables for a template for teachers' use, it was considered that teachers cannot reasonably be expected to supply accurate information about family context, home processes or community factors. Only easily identifiable family characteristics and personal characteristics relating to students' experiences in primary school were considered appropriate for inclusion.

Eivers et al.'s (2000) template also was designed for use in primary schools only and hence, did not feature some questions relevant to post primary school.

Conducting a series of logistic regression and chi-squared analyses on the family background and primary school factors, a combination of variables most effective in identifying Early School Leavers was identified. Nine indicators of Early School Leavers were identified: gender, family structure, number of siblings, father's employment status, mother's education, school absences, perceived ability, getting in to trouble with teachers and retention in a grade (Eivers et al., 2000).

Analysis revealed that some of the indicators distinguished between Early School Leavers and those who remained in school were more effective than others. Indicators were weighted in order to maximise differences between Early School Leavers and those who remained in school. To maximise the percentage of Early School Leavers identified and minimize the number of

those who remained, a cut off point of 4 was used. A student was identified as a potential early school leaver if s/he scored 4 or above.

It is considered that it would be beneficial if some account of the extent of disadvantage of the school (Eivers et al., 2000) were taken in to account. This may then necessitate a change in the cut off point number of 4, given that a significant portion of the school-going population attends schools classified as disadvantaged. Eivers et al. (2000) also propose the inclusion of an indicator to identify if a student is a member of the Travelling community.

Eivers et. al (2000) also points out that the sample used to generate the template will be likely to be twenty years olds by the time the template was to be used. As such, they highlight that the indicators of the level of maternal education and family size should be reconsidered.

An important note regarding the limitation of the Eivers et al., (2000) template, is the focus on the individual student (in terms of both family background and school experiences) and the neglect of family process factors and general school characteristics (bearing in mind the above discussion). It is important to note that whilst school experiences and family background are significant indicators of Early School Leaving, an instrument which relies solely on them is unlikely to be wholly accurate. It should also be noted that some difference between Early School Leavers and those who remain in school may not emerge until post primary school. Thus, it may be that a small number of Early School Leavers can only be identified as being at risk of Early School Leaving when in post primary school. As indicated previously, Early School Leavers are not a homogenous group; a template which treats Early School Leavers as such, may hide important differences. Whilst Early School Leavers have characteristics that differentiate them from those who remain in school, individual Early School Leavers will not have all the differentiating characteristics, some may have none. Even doubling the number of predictor variables does not identify all potential Early School Leavers and can increase the number of false positives.

Texas School District use four criteria: overage for grade; two or more years below grade level in reading or mathematics; failing in two or more courses in a semester and failing any section of the state minimum skills test. This is considered one of the better known tracking systems and it led to 40-50% of students being categorised as at risk on at least one criterion. In terms of predictive validity, 32.3% of students identified as at risk dropped out, while many who leave school early were not predicted (Bowman, cited in Gausatd, 1991). However, it is important to note that the inclusion of extra variables (such as demographic data and history of compensatory education), weighting the relative importance of variables and separate analysis by ethnic group increased the predictive validity to between 67.5%-100%, depending on ethnicity (Wilkinson and Frazer, 1990).

Other researchers have also achieved reasonable discrimination (see Barrington and Hendricks, 1989; Morris, Ehren and Lenz, 1991) though it is considered that discrimination is less precise in the early years of schooling (Barrington and Hendricks, 1989).

Any such template is also dependent on the accuracy of the data that is entered. Eivers et al. (2000) highlights that professional judgement should not be supplanted by the use of a template of weighted indicators.

Efforts to predict Early School Leaving have encountered difficulties with false negatives and false positives. Tracking systems have had difficulty in the over identification of those at risk of Early School Leaving. Defining a student as at risk on the basis of falling in to at least one category is problematic and has led to too large a group for targeted intervention. Classifying only those who fall n to all categories can lead to under-identification. Use of multiple indicators, each with an assigned weight of relative importance appears to be the most effective approach (Morris et al., 1991; Wilkinson and Frazer, 1990).

Developing a tracking template requires consideration of the variables for inclusion and how selected variables will be used to identify Early School Leavers.

Consideration must be given to who will enter data on the template and thus, what data will be available to them (paying due cognisance to the complexity of the situation). Variables selected should present those that are easily quantifiable, and that are most likely to distinguish between an early school leaver and a student who will remain at school.

Findings show that designing and implementing these Early Warning Systems requires schools to have the capacity to interpret risk indicators and design measures that respond to them. Another risk factor for Early Warning Systems is that they mostly focus on overt indicators of ‘reduced’ engagement, such as students’ grades, truancy or transgressive behaviour, despite these indicators not grasping emotional issues that could influence the process of Early School Leaving; nor do they address the contextual social factors influencing such a process. Students who do not display their high-risk status via diminishing achievement or transgressive behaviour could therefore be slipping past the radar unseen. Finally, the efficiency of Early Warning Systems should be evaluated based upon the intervention measures schools can design and implement to respond to low levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural school engagement as symptoms of wider social conditions.

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