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**Children and parents' participation: socio-ecological perspectives  
on health promotion in schools**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## ACRONYMS

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Meaning or Translation</b>
<b>RQ</b>	Research Questions
<b>HPS</b>	Health Promoting Schools
<b>NHPS</b>	Non-Health Promoting Schools
<b>PRP</b>	Participatory Research Process
<b>ENHPS</b>	European Network of Health Promoting Schools
<b>SHE</b>	Schools for Health in Europe
<b>SPHE</b>	Social, Personal and Health Education
<b>HSE</b>	Health Service Executive
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>HBSC</b>	Health Behaviour in School Aged Children
<b>MMR</b>	Mixed methods research
<b>CAC</b>	Cronbach's alpha coefficient

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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I declare/certify that, except where acknowledged, all parts of this thesis were undertaken by myself. The information contained in this thesis has not been used to obtain a degree in this, or another University.

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Yetunde O. John-Akinola

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## ABSTRACT

Schools are a key setting for health promotion. The development of Health Promoting Schools (HPS) draws on the settings-based approach to health promotion and includes child participation as one of its basic values. The psycho-social environment of the school is an important dimension for promoting the health and wellbeing of children but has rarely been directly investigated empirically. Parental participation is important for strengthening and sustaining the concept of school health promotion but little is written on the processes involved. This study explored the participation of children and their parents in school life and investigated the relevance of pupil participation for school environment and health and wellbeing of pupils. The study was conducted in two phases: a qualitative study was carried out in the first phase to document children (n=248) and parents' (n=39) views about participation in school life. Results from phase 1 indicated that the most common categories of what made pupils feel a part of their school were school uniforms, sports, friends, teachers and their school/classroom environment. Increase in the number of school activities, encouraging friendship and equal participation were key indicators of how pupils would ensure that everybody felt a part of the school. Parents also highlighted participation in school activities, feeling a part of school and encouraging parents to talk about how they feel as their most common categories on school participation. The findings from pupils and parents' conceptualisations of participation in school life, in the first phase, were used to develop pupil and parent questionnaires for the second phase (the quantitative study) thus linking the first phase to the second phase. A survey was carried out in the second phase to assess children (n=231) and parents' (n=218) current participation in Irish primary schools, and associations between school participation, school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils. Logistic regression analyses indicated positive associations between school participation and health and wellbeing outcomes, and school socio-ecological environment. Findings from the four journal articles that comprise this PhD research are discussed and references are made to the extant literature, general implications and recommendations for research, policy and practice, and implications of the findings for theory.

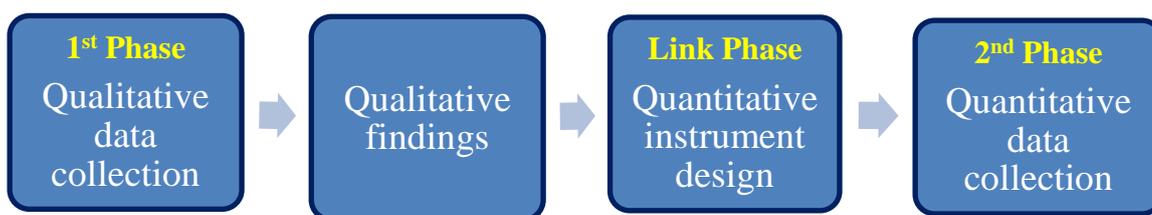
## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Purpose statement

The aim of this study was to explore the participation of children and their parents in school life and to investigate the relevance of pupil participation for school environment and health and wellbeing of pupils. This study employed a sequential exploratory mixed methods design. The purpose of using this mixed methods design was to first qualitatively explore conceptual descriptions of participation in school life among primary school pupils and parents of children in primary schools in the western part of Ireland (Galway city). The findings from the first (qualitative) phase represented the definitional basis for measuring the concept of children and parents' participation in school life in this study and were used to develop the instruments for the second (quantitative) phase of the study. The quantitative phase entailed using survey instruments to collect data from 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class primary school pupils and their parents. Figure 1.1 shows a summary of the sequential exploratory design as applied in this study.

**Figure 1.1 Summary of the sequential exploratory design**



#### 1.2 Health Promotion

In 1948, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as “*a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*” (WHO, 1948). This holistic view of health informed the development of the health promotion concept. At the first International Conference

on Health Promotion in Ottawa, health promotion was defined as “*the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health*” (WHO, 1986, p. 1). The Ottawa Charter argued that health promotion underscores the importance of not just being physically healthy, but it goes beyond that to encourage the promotion of the wellbeing of an individual or the whole community; it also emphasised that in conceptualising health from a health promotion perspective, “*health is seen as a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living*” (p. 1).

### **1.3 Settings approach to health promotion**

The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, 1986) acknowledged the influence that the environment or surroundings can have on an individual’s health and health promotion and established a course for the settings approach in health promotion. The recognition of people’s interactions within complex socio-cultural, economic and political environments and the influence of these on people’s health, either positively or negatively, forms the basis for the settings approach to health promotion (Paton, Sengupta & Hassan, 2005).

### **1.4 A socio-ecological perspective**

A socio-ecological perspective on the settings approach acknowledges that the environmental system in which people function affects and influences their health. The ecological perspective on health promotion could be described as a conceptual framework, which highlights the interactions between the individual and different levels of the environment; these interactions presuppose some level of influence on an individual’s behaviour (McLaren & Hawe, 2005).

### **1.5 Health promotion in the school setting**

The school has been identified as an important setting for promoting health and learning (e.g., Pommier, Guével, & Jourdan, 2010) and improving the school environment is considered an essential component of school health promotion in education programmes and research. School health promotion, based on a wide range of research and practice, has evolved over the course of the last 50 years (e.g., Stewart-Brown, 2006), alongside health promotion initiatives in other settings.

Simovska (2004) highlighted that a school that encourages positive physical and psychosocial environment may be beneficial to promoting health.

### **1.6 Health Promoting Schools**

The settings based approach to health promotion, as advocated by the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, 1986), formed the basis for the development of the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) initiative during the 1980s, led by WHO Europe in collaboration with the European Commission and the Council of Europe. The principles of the HPS, as outlined by the European Network of Health Promoting Schools (ENHPS) which is now known as the Schools for Health in Europe (SHE) Network (<http://www.schools-for-health.eu>), encourage schools across Europe to adopt a strategy that seeks to promote the health of the whole school, including the social and physical environment of the school (Barnekow, Buijs, Clift, Jensen, Paulus & Young, 2006).

### **1.7 Children's participation in school**

One of the principles within the settings-based approach is that of participation, which recognises the importance of encouraging the development of the decision-making capacity in order to initiate appropriate action. An increased interest in child participation and the possibility of the positive impact it could have on, not only the child, but also parents, families and broader society, has been highlighted (Simovska and Jensen, 2009). It has been hypothesised that the practice of genuine participation is essential for the success of a HPS programme, which impacts both on the student and the school environment as a whole (Simovska, 2000; Simovska, 2004).

### **1.8 Parents' participation in school**

One of the principles of HPS places emphasis on the school as existing within a wider community, and advocates for positive attention to be given to relationships between the school and the community, and particularly with the parents of pupils (Senior, 2012). Parents' participation in HPS is one of the four key pillars of the model of HPS adopted in Ireland in 1996 (Jensen & Simovska, 2002; Lahiff, 2000)

and is acknowledged as central to the development of successful school health promotion (Nic Gabhainn, O'Higgins & Barry, 2010).

## 1.9 Study aim and objectives

### Aim

The aim of this study was to explore the participation of children and their parents in school life and to investigate the relevance of pupil participation for school environment and health and wellbeing of pupils.

### Objectives

In meeting this aim, this study sets out six objectives, which were used to frame the research questions (RQ). The objectives were to:

#### Objective 1

1. Develop definitions and descriptions of participation relevant to school life in Ireland from children and parents' perspectives

**RQ 1:** What are the definitions of participation in school life from children and parents' perspectives?

#### Objective 2

2. Measure the perceptions of children on participation in school life.

**RQ 2:** What are the perceptions of pupils on participation in school life?

#### Objective 3

3. Measure the extent to which children's participation in school life is associated with health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils

**RQ 3:** Are there associations between participation of pupils in school life and health and wellbeing outcome for pupils?

#### Objective 4

4. Determine the relationship between children's participation in school life and the socio-ecological environment of the school

**RQ 4:** Are there associations between pupils' participation in school life and the socio-ecological environment of schools?

### **Objective 5**

5. Determine the relationship between the school socio-ecological environment and children's health and wellbeing

**RQ 5:** Are there associations between the school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcome for pupils?

### **Objective 6**

6. Investigate the views of parents and children on the participation of parents in school life

**RQ 6:** What are the views of parents and children about parents' current and possible future participation in school life?

**RQ 7:** To what extent do parents and children agree on the issue of parents' current and possible future participation in school life?

### **1.10 Outline of chapters/Thesis structure**

This section outlines a summary of all the chapters in this thesis.

Chapter 2 outlines the review of the literature on the health promotion concept, the settings approach to health promotion, health promotion in the school setting and the socio-ecological perspectives on health promotion as a theoretical framework applied to this study. The chapter further describes children and parents' participation in school life and the concept of HPS.

Chapter 3 describes the study methodology; it highlights the philosophical underpinnings for the study design and the rationale for the choice of methodological approach. The chapter further explains the design of the study instruments, the study methods, the process of data collection and analysis and how the pilots were conducted for the qualitative and quantitative studies.

Chapter 4 outlines the summary of the key findings from the four journal articles.

Chapter 5 presents a general discussion of the findings from all the four articles and outlines the strengths or contribution of the overall study findings to the literature, discusses how the four articles connect together and link back to the study aim, gives a summary of key contributions, examines general implications and



recommendations for future research, policy and practice and proposes the implications of the findings for theory. It also provides a conclusion for the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*"Learning is more than the acquisition of the ability to think; it is the acquisition of many specialised abilities for thinking about a variety of things." - Lev Vygotsky, Mind in Society, 1978.*

Lev Vygotsky, 1896-1934

#### **2.1 An introductory outline of the literature review**

This chapter examines the concept of health and health promotion, and the socio-ecological perspectives on health promotion settings. The chapter also describes the school as a setting for health promotion and how the settings approach to health promotion, as outlined at the Ottawa Charter, informed the development of the Health Promoting Schools (HPS). The concept of child participation as one of the key pillars of the HPS, and parents' participation, and its potential role in the development of successful school health promotion, are described. The chapter concludes with a summary.

#### **2.2 Health, health promotion and the Ottawa Charter**

Although health is considered a fundamental aspect of health promotion; the concepts of health and health promotion have been viewed from various perspectives, and many people and organisations have made an attempt to define both concepts from their own perspectives (Tones & Green, 2004). Tones and Green (2004) argued that the understanding of health as a theory is important in order to propose a discourse on the principles of health promotion. The conventional view of health with a focus on the curative or medical aspect of health has been challenged, and health promotion and its conceptual view of health from a holistic perspective has evolved over recent decades. The deviation from the medical and public health point of view, which targets the health of people from an individualistic, curative and

prevention of illness perspective, paved the way for the health promotion concept (Stokols, 1992).

The model of health promotion, unlike the public health perspective of illness prevention, places emphasis on reaching out to people not only at individual levels, but also at community and organisation levels, to enhance the capacity of the whole population, to improve the health behaviour of their collective environment and consequently to improve the health of the entire community (Stokols, 1992). Stokols (1992) also argued that looking at health from the lens of an individual being free from diseases or ill health cannot do justice to the whole concept of health; he suggested that viewing health from this perspective does not embrace a holistic analysis of people's health from a public perspective (Stokols, 1992). The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, 1986) established the first step in defining or describing a move towards a more holistic view of health and stated that *'Health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life; where they learn, work, play and love'* (WHO, 1986, p.3).

The Ottawa Charter, in encouraging a significant move towards a more holistic model of health from a health promotion perspective, identified and expanded on five levels at which health promotion can be practised; that is, *"building healthy public policy, creating supportive environments, strengthening community actions, developing personal skills and reorienting health services"* (WHO, 1986, p. 1-4). The Ottawa Charter for health promotion outlined, as one of its strategies, *"creating supportive environments"* (WHO, 1986, p.2) for health with a collaborative effort of all stakeholders in the society. This emphasis on a supportive environment that could encourage improvements in peoples' health led to the development of the settings approach to health promotion. The settings approach to health promotion suggests that peoples' health can be affected or modified by the settings in which they function. Over the years and at various fora, the values upheld by the Ottawa Charter have been criticised for their theoretical emphasis and lack of focus on evidence-based programs and research. Thus, more recently, O'Neill (2012) has suggested the need for a continuous critical reflection and debate on the Ottawa Charter. Nevertheless, the Ottawa Charter still continues to hold a central position in guiding discourse and research in the health promotion field (e.g., The Helsinki Statement on

Health in All Policies; WHO, 2013), and remains a significant basis for the settings approach to health promotion. The Ottawa Charter emphasised and suggested a move towards a socio-ecological view of health and proposed an inseparable link between people and their environment(s) and a consequent effect on their health.

### **2.3 Socio-ecological perspectives on health promotion settings**

The concept of ecology was in existence before health promotion and the study of health promotion from an ecological viewpoint can be traced to literature on human health and development (Stokols, 1992). An ecological perspective on the study of health promotion takes examples from medicine, public health, behavioural and social sciences (Richard, Gauvin & Raine, 2011). The development of ecology within these disciplines gave rise to the emergence of the ecological concept of health (Richard *et al.*, 2011). Thus, an ecological perspective on health promotion and prevention of illness has become an important aspect in health promotion and public health research.

Over the years, there has been a continual discourse concerning viewing health from an individual or collective perspective; the need for individuals to take control of their health, and the environmental effect on an individual's health has been emphasised (Tones and Green, 2004). The focus of health promotion interventions on targeting the environment within which people operate, which can act as a contributory factor to how people shape their health promoting behaviour, was suggested by Green and Kreuter (1990). Stokols (1992) further argued that although health promotion views health from a broader perspective and emphasises the collective health of the whole population, many health promotion programmes have attempted to improve the health behaviour of individuals within the community and organisations targeted. He suggested a more pragmatic focus of health promotion programmes should be to target the environment within which people function as opposed to health promotion programmes that are centred on promoting individual behaviours within settings (Stokols, 1992). This environmental approach to health promotion has helped to contribute to the discourse in the literature on the link between ecology and health promotion. Furthermore, this multilevel approach to health promotion programmes, which proposes that the adoption of a healthy lifestyle should take into consideration a broader context of the environment, and

socio-cultural characteristics of the setting in which an individual functions, has been proposed as the driving force towards an ecological model approach to health promotion (Richard *et al.*, 2011).

#### **2.4 Theoretical perspective/underpinnings of this study**

An ecological perspective was adopted as the theoretical underpinning for this study. Many researchers have described different models through which the ecological concept can be applied (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler & Glanz, 1988; Stokols, 1992). In describing an ecological perspective on health behaviour, Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1986) theorised that human growth and development is shaped by a number of environmental factors: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and later the chronosystem. The microsystem is comprised of individual characteristics or interpersonal relationships - an individual is continuously being influenced and formed both by the environment and through connections with other people. The understanding of this influence and construction can be investigated in the process of child development. For example, a child's growth and development is affected not only by the environment but by many other external factors like schools, peer groups, teachers, educational level and support from parents; other examples of microsystems could be friends, sports or social clubs and family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Mesosystems were described as organisational systems, which may include church, schools, peer groups, companies and sport teams, within which microsystems function and they control the environment in which an individual or groups of people relate (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It has been argued that the more effective the communication process within the mesosystem, the stronger effect it has on the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

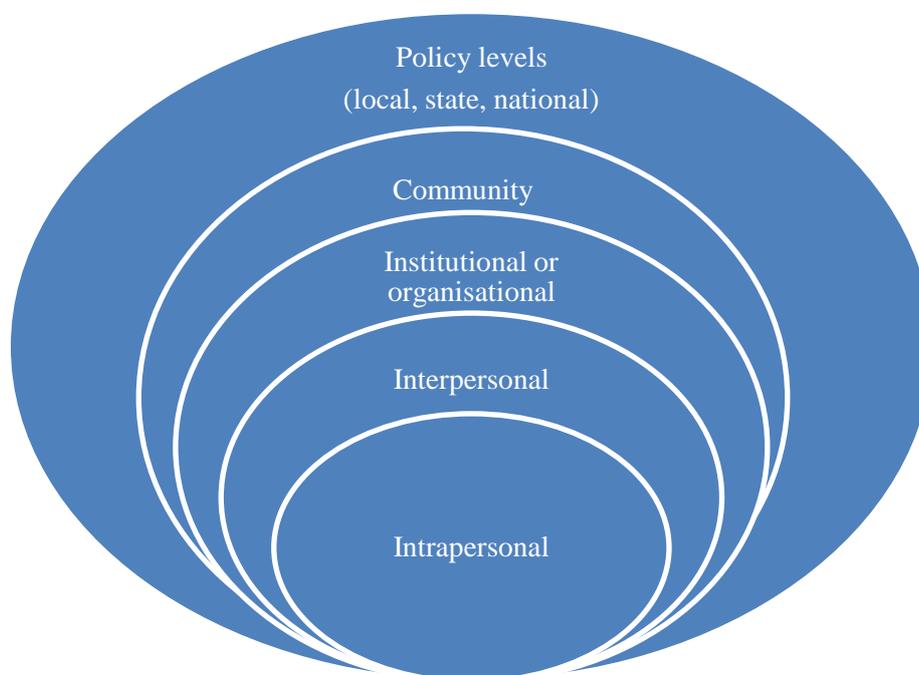
Exosystems consist of influence at the community level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Although the community level interactions could be within a geographic region, this physical or spatial affiliation does not necessarily determine the description of the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Furthermore, even though the exosystems are community settings that might influence an individual directly or indirectly, the individual does not need to be an active contributor (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Macrosystems refer to the cultural beliefs and values that guide the processes within which micro- and meso- systems operate (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). They are philosophies or beliefs that influence the microsystem and mesosystem. The effect of the cultural beliefs and values may be more visible than other levels of systems because they seem to create a greater impact on people (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Examples of cultural influences include cultural beliefs formed about smoking, communism, religion, and so on.

The chronosystem describes the experiences of an individual over time and the influences of the environment or setting in which a person lives on their developmental process (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Bronfenbrenner implied that these contexts influence human behaviour and development; at the same time, behaviour also exerts some effect on these factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986).

Based on Bronfenbrenner's work, a socio-ecological health promotion framework was proposed by McLeroy *et al.* (1988) (see Figure 2.1, p.12).

**Figure 2.1** A social-ecological model of children’s participation in school  
(adapted from McLeroy *et al.* (1988))



**Individual:** Individual characteristics that influence behaviour for example, perceptions of school participation, knowledge, attitudes towards school participation and so on

**Interpersonal:** Interpersonal processes and primary groups; school socio-ecological environment (e.g. friends, teachers) that provide social identity and role definition

**Institutional/ Organizational:** Rules, regulations, policies, and informal structures (school policies)

**Community:** Social networks, norms or standards (e.g., parental participation in school life)

**Social Structure, Policy and Systems:** Local, state, federal policies and laws that regulate or support child participation and health and wellbeing

This framework identifies interconnected perspectives at the intrapersonal (highlights the characteristics of the individual such as knowledge, perceptions or attitudes), interpersonal (describes the relationships between an individual’s formal and informal networks or systems), organisational (institutional or organisational characteristics), community (relationships with informal networks within clear boundaries) and the policy levels (local, state or national laws and policies guiding health promotion actions) (e.g., Moore, Murphy & Moore, 2011; Moore, de Silva-Sanigorski & Moore, 2013) and is recommended as a theoretical, methodological or

evaluative tool in carrying out health improvement interventions (Moore *et al.*, 2011). In a further discourse, the ecological perspective on health promotion was defined by McLaren and Hawe as;

*“a conceptual framework designed to draw attention to individual and environmental determinants of behaviour. The visual metaphor is a series of concentric or nested circles which represents a level of influence on behaviour (for example, intrapersonal factors, interpersonal processes, organisations, community, and public policy)”.*

(2005, p. 9) (see Figure 2.1).

An important characteristic of an ecological model, that which makes it distinct, is its ability to relate the physical setting in which people live or function, to their individual lives, interpersonal relationships and the organisational and community structures of the settings.

#### *2.4.1 The ecological model applied to child development*

Ecological models of human development can be applied to the principles of child development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The developmental stages of a child can be viewed from the perspective of the continuous, multi-faceted, active and direct interactions of the child with people, non-living things and symbolic representations in the environment. The relationship of a child with the environment is said to be influential when it takes place constantly over a long period of time, as seen in a school setting (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). This model of child development argues that a child influences and is also influenced by the environment in which the child lives, plays or learns. A child’s family also contributes immensely to his or her emotional and psychological development because the family environment is where the child spends majority of his or her time. Other settings where a child spends time apart from school and family may include a day care centre, with other family members apart from the immediate family, playgrounds in the neighbourhood, community libraries and health care settings. The child interacts with all these settings and interactions with these settings determine to a great degree

how the child grows (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). In addition, a child's development is affected by the quality and quantity of relations between the different settings in which time is spent (for example, the family and school).

## **2.5 The settings approach to health promotion**

An ecological perspective on health behaviour and health promotion argues that people should not be viewed individually but as part of the larger society, in which they live, work and play; this ecological perspective is a major determinant for the increased interest in the settings approach. The settings approach to health promotion originated from the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, 1986) and acknowledges the importance of people-environment interactions. It argues that individual people do not exist alone, but within multifaceted settings of the society including families, community, peer groups, organisations, institutions, cultural, political, economic and religious settings. An ecological approach recognises that an individual exists within these various social, political, economic and environmental settings and decisions and health are invariably influenced by these settings (e.g., Gottlieb & McLeroy, 1994; Lantz *et al.*, 1998; Stokols, 1992, 1996; WHO, 1986). It has been hypothesised that when a location or an environment is said to be healthy, that is a *healthy setting*, such as a healthy school or HPS, where people-environment interactions exist, it can be regarded, from a health promotion perspective, as a socio-ecological setting. This identifies the health and wellbeing of the people in that setting as being influenced by the connectedness and relationship between the intrapersonal, interpersonal, organisational and communal system working within that locality or surroundings (Dooris, 2009). As suggested by Poland, Green and Rootman (2000), the main focus in this ecological setting should be to promote the cooperation and collaboration of everybody involved, which ought to help in improving their confidence and self-esteem.

The environment in which an individual lives or functions is very important in health promotion interventions. Consequently, programmes should be directed towards modifying the environment in which a person lives or functions, rather than focusing on changing the individuals themselves. For example, the World Health Report 2002 *reiterated* that

*“... since individuals are not free agents, risks can best be understood as a social construct within particular historical and cultural contexts and within groups and institutions, not only at the individual level. ... risks should not be treated independently and separately from the complex social, cultural, economic and political circumstances in which people experience them”*

(WHO, 2002, p. 36-37).

This signified a shift from a simplified focus on programmes targeted at individual health alone, to multifaceted programmes focusing on the effect of the wider environmental determinants on people’s health (for example, a socio-ecological model of health promotion) (Green, Richard & Potvin, 1996). It has also been suggested that the settings approach may place a strong emphasis on integrated and sustainable developmental programmes that are settings-based, rather than on initiating simultaneous but separate health promotion projects targeting individuals interacting within a specific environment (Johnson & Baum, 2001). The healthy settings approach aims to use a holistic approach with the main goal of integrating a consciousness of health into the multifaceted fabric of settings, including the culture, structure, processes and everyday life (Doherty & Dooris, 2006). The settings approach presents a planned course of action which endeavours to pave a way for an integrated system of thinking and thus encourage sustainable changes to take place.

The settings approach to health promotion can be applied in various ways. Settings like schools, workplace, communities and hospitals constitute key settings for health promotion (Hodgins & Scriven, 2012; Chu *et al.*, 2000). The main goal of the settings approach to health promotion is to transform a setting, like a school, into a health promoting setting (Noblet, 2003). The goal of the settings approach to health promotion is different from the conventional health education process which aims to use settings as locations to reach out to people to improve their standard of living and wellbeing. The usual focus of the activities of the traditional health promotion methods is on changing people’s attitudes and behaviours. The settings approach to health promotion, on the other hand, puts a lot of emphasis on discovering the factors impeding a ‘healthier’ lifestyle within settings and trying to resolve the ‘problem’. Although the settings approach to health promotion does not do away with the relevance of the individual-based, conventional methods, it calls attention to

dealing with the underlying issues obstructing the wellbeing of people in a setting (Noblet & Murphy, 1995). In order to maximise programmes and interventions to improve children's health, a settings approach is considered suitable, for both practical and theoretical reasons. A settings approach can employ the physical and socio-cultural settings in which children live, learn, play and work, which are the home, community and school, to improve the health of children. The settings approach thus informed the development of the HPS.

## **2.6 School Health Promotion**

Based on an extensive research and practice over the last 50 years, school health promotion has gradually developed alongside other health promotion programmes that have applied the settings approach (Stewart-Brown, 2006). Recent advancement of health promotion in the school setting can be linked to a broader understanding of work that has been done in health promotion in the past 20 years (Young, 2005). Health promotion in schools is understood to be a social process that seeks to encourage both individual and collective empowerment. The school setting has always been important for health promotion programmes because it provides a location to target large groups of children or young people at the same time; there is also the availability of trained professionals like teachers. People in communities and those working in the health area see schools as playing a contributory role in improving the health and general wellbeing of the society (St. Leger, 2004). Thus, schools are seen to have the potential to contribute to the reduction of general health problems in the society. Many countries and international agencies have initiated health programmes which adopt this settings approach (St. Leger, 1997).

## **2.7 Health Promoting Schools**

The settings approach to school health promotion, as interpreted from the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, 1986), informed the development of HPS programmes in the 1980s. The WHO has defined the HPS as a school “*that constantly strengthens its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working*” (WHO, 2014, [http://www.who.int/school\\_youth\\_health/gshi/hps/en/](http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/gshi/hps/en/)). The HPS was founded upon the principles of democracy, and supports the concept of equity and seeks to create an environment that encourages personal and social

development with the aim of promoting the health of the whole school environment (WHO, 1997). The HPS is a learning environment that always seeks to expand the potential of the participants in their environment to improve their health by improving their knowledge on healthy living and working (WHO, 1997). The HPS came into being during a period when there were doubts that an educational approach alone, especially in schools, could have a significant effect on the health of the people (Young, 2005). Thus, the HPS initiative emphasises the significance of the whole school environment at the core of its agenda, to promote health (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006; Simovska, 2004; 2012).

The HPS model highlights the socio-ecological settings approach as a theoretical foundation where pupils and teachers are considered as part of a larger social network in which they live, work and play (Macnab, Gagnon & Stewart, 2014). In addition, the relationship of the school with the surrounding community and creating a supportive environment for community action has been identified as important in delivering the desired health outcomes (Macnab *et al.*, 2014).

The HPS views the school as a social system in which there can arise opportunities to make some structural changes to the school's physical and psychosocial environment, including the school curricula, teaching and learning methods (e.g. Lee *et al.*, 2010); these changes seek to adopt a more comprehensive approach to improve the environments of the school community and ultimately promote health individually and collectively (Simovska, 2004). The Stellenbosch consensus statement on Health Promoting Schools (Macnab, 2013) endorsed the World Health Organization (WHO) HPS concept, but implied that the development of the HPS concept in schools does not require the provision of new resources or human and financial investments but rather should focus on the school and its ethos, and the improvement or refinement of educational investments (Macnab, 2013). Lee, Keung, Lo, Kwong and Armstrong (2014) have further suggested that the HPS could be considered as a novel approach or model of schooling instead of a supplementary or additional programme.

### 2.7.1 The development of Health Promoting Schools in Europe and Ireland

The HPS programme was spearheaded by the WHO in collaboration with the European Commission and the Council of Europe. The ‘whole school environment’ is an important concept in the HPS approach that emphasises the importance of interpersonal relationships within the school environment (WHO, 1993; 1997). This emphasises the importance of not basing learning in schools on teaching alone but also on making the whole school environment, including the physical, social and structural environments healthy and conducive to learning (Simovska, 2004). The WHO initiative aimed to increase the number of schools that can actually be called HPS. In order to authenticate this, the European Network of Health Promoting Schools (ENHPS) was created in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1991 (St Leger, 1999), and was formally established in 1992 (Buijs, 2009; Senior, 2012). It was jointly supported by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the WHO Regional Office for Europe. The network started with a pilot project in 1991 in three countries: Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia (St Leger, 1999), and developed into a pilot study of seven countries in 1992 (Buijs, 2009), including Ireland. By 1997, about 37 countries had become members of the network (St Leger, 1999). More recently, the ENHPS, now known as Schools for Health in Europe (SHE) Network ([www.schools-for-health.eu/](http://www.schools-for-health.eu/)), has over 40 countries as part of the network (Buijs, 2009; Simovska, 2004).

The principles guiding the development and implementation of the HPS in all schools across the European Network as approved by the ENHPS at its first conference in Greece in 1997 (WHO, 1997), viewed health from a holistic perspective with the aim of encouraging a healthy social and physical environment in the community, as opposed to the conventional medical view of health, with its belief in the curative system approach to health. It emphasised the empowerment of people both at the individual and collective level as the core goal of the HPS development (Simovska, 2004).

Individual countries across the network, including Ireland (Lahiff, 2002), have developed the HPS model based on what is considered appropriate and achievable in different countries (see Jensen & Simovska, 2002). The focus of the HPS concept in Ireland is seen from the perspective of the whole-school development. Each school is

viewed as a distinct social system with its own characteristics. Based on the components of the HPS, each school maps out its own areas of priority on the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, school environment, staff development services and parent and community participation (Nic Gabhainn & Kelleher, 1998). Although there are still many hurdles to be crossed, the development of the HPS concept has been progressing in many schools, both primary and post-primary, in Ireland (HSE, 2013). The Irish government through the Health Service Executive (HSE) developed the Health Promotion Strategic Framework (HSE, 2011) and Schools for Health in Ireland Framework for developing a HPS (HSE, 2013), to support and guide HPS programmes and research in Ireland. It identified opportunities within the HPS model to expand developments in schools by encouraging positive school environments, encouraging curricula and learning that promote health and wellbeing, whole school development, participation and partnerships with parents or guardians and the local community (HSE, 2011).

### 2.7.2 The Health Promoting School environment

Within the HPS model, health is construed from a holistic perspective, which incorporates a whole school approach to school health promotion, emphasising the significance of the school environment and the surrounding community on health (e.g., Parsons, Stears & Thomas, 1996; Simovska, 2008). This assumes that within the school community, and its health education programme, the setting and ‘feel’ of the school environment, including health promotion activities are important, and work interactively to improve the health and wellbeing of the whole school and surrounding community (Lee, Ho & Keung, 2010). Although children are at the hub of the HPS approach, the plan of action must move beyond focus on the individual child to include the whole school environment (Inchley, Muldoon & Currie, 2007). It has been implied that the focus of the HPS approach should be more on promoting a conducive, healthy physical, psychosocial and learning environment within the school setting as opposed to the positive amendment of individual behaviour (Parsons *et al.*, 1996). The WHO, in describing the HPS, highlighted its socio-ecological characteristics by encouraging improvements in individual health, the health of the whole school and surrounding communities (Langford *et al.*, 2014;

WHO, 2011). Research demonstrating evidence of the school environment on health is thus required (Inchley *et al.*, 2007) and fit into the research questions for this study. Literature showing school-based research has indicated associations between the school environment and specific health-related behaviours among pupils (e.g., Maes & Lievens, 2003; McLellan, Rissel, Donnelly & Bauman, 1999), health-risk behaviours (e.g., Chapman, Buckley, Sheehan, Shochet & Romaniuk 2011; Denny, Robinson, Utter, Fleming, Grant, Milfont & Clark, 2011; Perra, Fletcher, Bonell, Higgins & McCrystal, 2012), improved school attendance (Bryant, Shdaimah, Sander & Cornelius, 2013), but has not linked the school environment to general health and wellbeing of pupils. This current study sought to fill the gap in the literature by providing an answer to one of the research questions for the study: are there associations between the school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcome for pupils? This study investigated associations between the school socio-ecological environment, highlighting features related to the intrapersonal, interpersonal, policy and the community characteristics of the school, and measures related to general health and wellbeing of pupils including pupils' self-rated health, perceptions of happiness, self-esteem and life satisfaction.

## **2.8 The concept of child participation**

The HPS has been identified as an open concept that should encourage the participation of children and young people (Buijs, 2009). The HPS seeks to promote a democratic learning environment in which children and young people's competences could be developed to enable them identify and make health promoting choices (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006). The HPS movement draws from the guidelines outlined in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, 1986) and *Health 21-Health for All in the 21st Century: The Health for All Policy Framework for the WHO European Region*, which maps out specific targets for health in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (WHO, 1999), and has mainly tried to apply these guidelines to school settings. These targets view health as a fundamental human right and encourage equity in health and the participation of all stakeholders at different levels, for example, home, schools, communities and national levels, in the health development process (Simovska 2004; WHO, 1999). The Ottawa Charter (WHO, 1986) highlighted empowerment and the development of personal and social skills and based on this, the HPS has placed much emphasis on child empowerment and

participation especially within school settings. It has identified the importance of encouraging the development of the decision-making capacity of children in order to initiate appropriate action. This can be related to the resolution from the First Conference of the ENHPS (WHO, 1997), which highlights that “*participation is closely linked to the development of empowerment and action competence*” (p.4). Thus children’s participation in school life, for the purposes of promoting empowerment, represents one of the key concepts and strategies of the HPS model (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006; Buijs, 2009; Jensen & Simovska, 2005) and has become one of the core values of the Schools for Health in Europe.

The first and second conferences of the ENHPS identified democracy, equity, participation and partnership as part of the main principles of the HPS initiative (WHO, 1997; 2002). The WHO in the Health 21- Health for All in the 21<sup>st</sup> century also emphasised the need for equity in health and encouraged participatory health development processes that involve all stakeholders (WHO, 1999). The principles of democracy and equity are central to the HPS initiative and underscore the need for establishing the HPS initiative on the principles of democracy and participation (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006). This encourages an atmosphere of learning, personal and social development and health for all pupils; with the aim of empowering and developing the action competence of pupils (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006). The principle of pupil participation has been identified as relevant to the development of the HPS (Clift & Jensen, 2005; Jensen & Simovska, 2005) and seeks to develop the potential of pupils to make health-promoting choices and, in addition, empower them with the required skills to take action in effecting these choices (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006).

Child participation emerged as an issue during the latter parts of the 1970s (Simovska & Jensen, 2009). Since that period, the concept of participation has been expanded and developed. After the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* was laid out by the United Nations in 1989 (United Nations, 1989), various researchers and practitioners have contributed to the understanding of child participation; this in turn has evolved into various complementary school programmes and projects for children and young people. Within the school setting, the right of children to participate has been demonstrated (von Wright, 2006). Many nations, in Europe and other parts of the world, have enacted policies, made recommendations and

developed programmes that enhance the facilitation of children and young people's participation (Simovska & Jensen, 2009). The increased interest in children's participation and the possibility of the positive end result it can have on, not only children but also their parents, families and the society in general, has been highlighted in the various conferences, workshops, training, publications and meetings that have been organised in this regard (Simovska & Jensen, 2009).

### 2.8.1 Definitions, perceptions and understanding of children's participation

Various models of child participation have been proposed. For example, Roger Hart, drawing on earlier work by Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969) proposed what he called a 'ladder of participation' (Hart, 1992; 1997). He outlined eight steps on the ladder of participation that were referred to as models of participation, which were divided into two main parts, non-participation and genuine participation. Chawla and Heft (2002) hypothesised that Hart's ladder of children's participation could be regarded as the process through which participation can be practiced, and not levels of participation (Chawla & Heft, 2002). However, and as a further development on Hart's ladder of participation, Simovska (2004) proposed two main categories of child participation, "token" or "genuine" participation; genuine participation refers to an environment in which children are free to demonstrate their potential actively in school, which at the same time produces an atmosphere of learning and a positive effect on the children (Simovska, 2004). In contrast, token participation pre-supposes that the condition of learning has been set out and children contribute; they do not have control over the activities but can gain some information from the experience. In addition, Cook, Blanchet-Cohen and Hart (2004) highlighted five elements through which children's participation could be measured: the '*purpose of participation, level of participation, scope of participation, evolving capacity to participate, and meaningful participation indicators*' (p. 19) as factors that could be used to measure the value or significance of children's participation in an event or programme. More recently, a pilot framework for monitoring and evaluating children's experience of participation was developed by Lansdown in 2011 (Lansdown, 2011). The framework was based on measuring children's participation at three levels including '*scope of participation*'; '*quality of participation*'; and '*impact of participation*' (Lansdown, 2011, p.21).

However, despite these different understandings or perceptions of measuring the concept of child participation, it has been suggested that the measurement of children's participation at any particular time, and in any programme, should be dependent on the type of programme, the extent to which children are expected to, or would want to participate, and the context within which the programme is to be carried out, that is at a local, regional, national or global level (Hart, 2008). Lansdown (2011) implied that there is no laid-down principle or measure that can be used to assess children's participation and was of the opinion that any programme or activities involving children, whether at the community, national or global level, will have to adapt to the type of participatory process feasible and practicable within the context of that program or event.

There are different perceptions of participation, depending on the context in which it is being considered or discussed. According to Rifkin *et al.*, participation relates to the perspective on participation in terms of empowerment and democracy (Rifkin, Muller & Bichmann, 1988). It has been suggested that Rifkin's approach could be of interest in investigating participation in health education and health promotion programmes, especially with reference to schools (Simovska, 2007). Rifkin, Muller and Bichmann (1988) proposed three essential explanations by which participation could be analysed. The first was that participation ought to include the lively involvement of the contributors. They argued that participation should not just be the passing on of health information to people. A second was that participation should involve the partakers of a programme having the ability to make a preferred choice. This allows them to be able to exercise some form of influence over the implementation of the programme. It was further highlighted that participation should not be insignificant but valuable (Rifkin *et al.*, 1988). This means that if participants in a programme are allowed to make choices, but their preferences are not embedded in the programme planning and evaluation, it amounts to their contribution being pointless. It has been argued that child participation should be about effective communication with children to encourage them to share their ideas about a discourse and have some influence over the consequent decisions and actions taken, and should not just be a forum to hear their voice or for them to write down their opinion (Mager & Novak, 2010; Mager & Novak, 2012).

Furthermore, many definitions and terms (e.g., Barnekow *et al.*, 2006) have been used to describe the concept of child participation in school, and various levels of child participation have been proposed (e.g., Hart, 1992; Hart, 1997; Jensen & Simovska, 2005; Simovska, 2004). Child participation has been defined as a process whereby children and young people collaborate with others concerning matters that have to do with their collective wellbeing (Chawla, 2001). Pupil participation has been described as pupils expressing their views on different subjects in class, with the purpose of creating an environment to foster the development of their cognitive skills (Simovska, 2007). In addition, child participation in school life has been defined as the practice of involving pupils in democratic or joint decision-making in the school setting or taking part in the decision processes within schools (Griebler, Rojatz, Simovska & Forster, 2012; Griebler, Rojatz, Simovska & Forster, 2014; Mager & Novak, 2010; Mager & Novak, 2012; Simovska, 2007) or the process of engaging the interest of children in diverse programmes (Simovska, 2004). Children being allowed to contribute to decision-making, especially in fora that concern them in their schools, signify one of the major features that can highlight a school as a HPS (Simovska, 2004).

Another line of thought has described children's participation in schools or communities as a form of the different approaches that teachers or adults in general take to encourage the interactions of children in activities or other deeds that could promote their health and wellbeing (Simovska & Jensen, 2009). An essential goal of child participation should be to achieve a common ground or consensus between how the child views their world and the way adults perceive the child's outlook (Kjørholt, 2001). Nevertheless, there remains a need to define what participation in school means from a child's perspective. This study sought to provide such a definition and led to one of the research questions for this study: what are the definitions of participation in school life from children's perspective?

## **2.9 Pupil participation in Health Promoting Schools**

The HPS model underscores pupil participation as one of its basic values and the structure of the school environment is considered important for pupil participation in the school life. The HPS environment seeks to provide a supportive environment for pupils in order to create an atmosphere that encourages holistic learning and

development, and also to encourage the promotion of school connectedness (Rowe, Stewart & Patterson, 2007). In addition, the development of the HPS approach is believed to play a contributory role in the enhancement of a school environment that promotes fairness and builds the confidence of all the people in the school community, especially the pupils (Simovska, 2004). Consequently, it has been argued that the HPS encourages the participation of pupils in school and can improve cooperation and team-work among pupils, which helps to engender good relationships between the student body, the school staff and community (Simovska, 2000). Furthermore, pupil participation in school life has the ability to empower students' decision-making processes. All these have the potential of building a school that is holistically healthy (Simovska, 2000).

Pupil and staff empowerment is an important goal of the HPS; the HPS reinforces the creation of democratic school communities in which everyone's opinion and point of view is given due consideration and respect (Simovska, 2007). In this regard, health promotion in schools should have the goal of encouraging pupils to have freedom of expression in all aspects of the educational methods and approaches used in teaching, thus, creating in them a sense of belonging. This gives them a choice of improving themselves and their environment. The HPS movement encourages the enhancement of pupils' cognitive and communication skills, improving their ability to make positive choices, as well as understanding the process of developing capacity for team-work within the school, in order to improve the health behaviour of the school environment (Cook *et al.*, 2004; Simovska, 2004; Simovska, 2007). Therefore, the achievement of a holistic health promotion involves both the cognitive and experiential knowledge of the pupil and thriving interactions with other people in the school environment. This has consequences for both research focus and methods in the area of HPS. It has been argued that the close connection or association of children with their environment, such as in schools, has the potential to constitute a strong determinant for the enhancement of children's participation in the school setting (Simovska, 2004).

The socio-ecological theoretical model provides an understanding of how the link between children's participation and their capacity to perform is strengthened and improved in the context of the principle of the HPS approach, which emphasises the

importance of democracy. For example, children's relationships with their teachers and other adults in their lives and immediate environment have considerable influence over children's lives because they generate a central point of reference for them (e.g., Simovska, 2004). These social interactions within and among the school community are assumed to produce an environment that can foster school development (Pianta, 1999; Simovska, 2004). Thus, from a HPS perspective, the structure or framework of the school environment – the policies, management structure, 'feel' of the school in terms of the social environment, the physical environment, school ethos and curriculum – are hypothesised to be linked with pupil participation in the life of the school (Simovska, 2007). This led to one of the research questions for the study: are there associations between the participation of children and the socio-ecological environment of schools?

Overall, in conducting a successful school-based intervention programme that can be said to be health promoting, it has been suggested that participation could be viewed as the end-point and goal of the health promotion programme. At the same time, it could also be the process by which the goal can be authentically achieved (Simovska, 2007).

## **2.10 Effect of child participation in school**

Encouraging children to be active collaborators can contribute both to their educational and personal development and could also empower them to be successful contributors to their society. Evidence suggests that participation can encourage the development of pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem (Griebler *et al.*, 2012). Pupil participation has been identified as important in nurturing a favourable social and physical school environment (Griebler *et al.*, 2012). Research has identified that pupils as young as those in Grades 1 to 6 have the potential to both initiate and be active participants in guiding health-promoting changes in their school environment (Gådin, Weiner & Ahlgren, 2009). It has been suggested that genuine participation is essential for the success of a HPS programme, which impacts both on the pupil and the school environment as a whole (Simovska, 2000; Simovska, 2004). Furthermore, genuine student participation can provide the opportunity for students to have a sense of ownership in the method of learning (Simovska, 2007). Pupil participation in school could further lead to an effective and

genuine interest in improving the capacity of students' involvement in all aspects of teaching and learning in the school community (Simovska, 2004). However, the involvement of children should not diminish the expert contribution of teachers or health professionals and should not affect the authenticity of the health teaching. In this regard, teachers should be encouraged in advancing the health promotion approach by providing the teachers with flexible, interactive and conducive environment as well as appropriate health promoting teaching materials in the school to enhance their health promotion programmes.

Children's participation in school has been associated with positive health and wellbeing (de Róiste, Kelly, Molcho, Gavin & Gabhainn, 2012; Simovska & Jensen, 2009), and its impact on pupils' positive views of their school has been reported (de Róiste *et al.*, 2012). It has been suggested that child participation could promote positive health outcomes among children and young people (Simovska & Jensen, 2009).

More emphasis within child participation programmes has, however, been placed on the processes involved in engaging young people in interventions specifically designed to improve aspects of their health and wellbeing, usually focusing on health-related behaviours (e.g., Griebler *et al.*, 2014). This current study however placed emphasis on the general participation of pupils in everyday school life, not just in specific health-related projects, and how this could be related to their general wellbeing. The following research questions were thus posed: What are the perceptions of children on participation in school life? Are there associations between participation of children in school and health and wellbeing outcome for pupils? Are there associations between the school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcome for pupils in schools? These research questions imply that health and wellbeing may be improved or sustained by efforts to engage with and listen to pupils during the normal school day. In addition, these research questions suggest that the literature on the relationships between participation, school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes, particularly from a quantitative perspective, remains underdeveloped, and thus that a study such as this could be a useful step towards our understanding of these concepts.

## 2.11 The concept of parents' participation

Parental involvement is crucial to the health and wellbeing of a child and the crucial role of parents in the developmental years of their children cannot be over emphasised. The vital role of parenting in the early development of young people is well established (e.g., Viner *et al.*, 2012), and evidence for the supportive role of parents within schools is also accumulating (e.g., DCSF, 2008; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). The amount and value of the interrelationships within the settings where children spend their time (including both their family and schools) may affect their growth and development. Positive outcomes may be expected when parents participate actively in facilitating the promotion of the health and wellbeing of their children (Lahiff, 2000). For instance, there are examples (e.g., Perry, Luepker, Murray, Kurth, Mullis, Crockett & Jacobs, 1988; Young, de Boer, Mikkelsen & Rasmussen, 2005) of parents and representatives of the community influencing food policies in schools through involvement in school nutrition action groups resulting in healthy alternatives being provided for the students. The active involvement of parents in a home-based healthy-eating school programme revealed more effect on the dietary behaviour of young people and suggests it might be important to consider parental involvement in relation to changes in children's health behaviour (Perry *et al.*, 1988). Similarly, in some European countries, partnerships with parents have been considered necessary in promoting healthy eating behaviours among young people (Young *et al.*, 2005). Involving parents, caregivers and community members in schools could be of considerable value in providing their skills and expertise to assist schools in planning and implementing health promotion initiatives.

### 2.11.1 Descriptions and types of parental participation in school life

Similar to the concept of child participation, parental participation in school life has also been described in various ways and different terms have been used to refer to parents' participation in school. Terms such as 'parental involvement', 'parental engagement' and 'parental participation' have been used inter-changeably in some contexts; in some other instances, the terms used to describe parents' participation in school have been clearly defined, although the definitions given are not consistent. In addition, parental participation in schools has been described in a variety of ways, each representing different views on what the given term encompasses. Epstein

(1995; 2011) referred to parents' involvement in the context of '*school-family partnerships*', Hill and Taylor (2004) have referred to parental participation as '*parental school involvement*', while Feuerstein (2000) has referred to '*parent-school relationship*' and others to '*home-school links*' (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Other typologies of parental participation have been developed based on the types of activities parents are involved in (for example, Anderson & Minke, 2007; Dimock, O'Donoghue & Robb, 1996), or parents' beliefs system (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins & Closson, 2005). However, in this study, the term 'parents' or parental participation' in school was used to refer to the involvement of parents in school. The term 'parental participation' used in this study refers to a broad set of activities where schools make it possible for parents to take an active role in the life of the school and/or parents volunteer to take part in school activities and events. But in the review of the literature, the original terminology used to refer to parents' participation in the literature reviewed has been retained.

Parents participate in schools in different ways and various types of parental participation in school life have been documented in the literature. Some parents are part of the parents' association (e.g., Lahiff, 2000); parents' attendance at parent-teacher meetings and in other school activities could also be described as a type of parental participation in school life (Feuerstein, 2000; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006). In addition, parents' participation in school events (Hill & Taylor, 2004) is also regarded as a type of parental participation in school life. Parents' involvement in their child's education, for example, assisting with child's homework (e.g., Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Van Voorhis, 2011) or by way of reading activities at home (e.g. Silinskis *et al.*, 2013; van Steensel, McElvany, Kurvers & Herppich, 2011) is also attributed as a type of parental participation in school.

The potential influence of a positive relationship between the two systems - home and school - within which children function, on improving children's lives has been highlighted (Graue, Kroeger & Prager, 2001). In addition, it has been suggested that both the education and wellbeing of children is significantly linked to the relationship between the school and the home, and especially with parents (e.g., Hirsto, 2010). Although the participation of parents in school life can sometimes be

difficult and challenging (e.g., Harris & Goodall, 2008; Horby & Lafaele, 2011; Ingram *et al.*, 2007) and issues that relate to barriers to parents' participation in school have been highlighted in school health promotion discourse (Garcia-Dominic *et al.*, 2010), parents' participation in school life is generally viewed positively and it has been argued that school-home relationships should be supported (Cowan, Swearer Napolitano & Sheridan, 2004; Mattingly *et al.*, 2002).

### **2.12 Parents' participation in Health Promoting School settings**

The model of HPS includes links with the surrounding communities (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006) and this has been acknowledged as central to the development of successful school health promotion (Nic Gabhainn *et al.*, 2010). However, one outstanding issue is the question of how schools and parents can make the connection to help children reach their potential (e.g., Cowan, Swearer Napolitano & Sheridan, 2004). It has been argued that a friendly and welcoming physical and psychosocial environment in the school has the potential to create an atmosphere that encourages participation of parents (Michael, Dittus & Epstein 2007). In addition, it has been theorised that it is crucial for pupils and parents to have a sense of ownership and commitment in the school life. This is speculated to go a long way in determining a successful outcome for the HPS programme (St Leger, Young, Blanchard & Perry 2010). From the viewpoint of the HPS which places a great significance on the whole school approach, the structure of the school, including the connections within the school community and the feel of the school environment may have a major effect on the educational and learning process of children in the school. This generates an important research area for HPS and relates to one of the research questions in this study: what are the views of parents and children about parents' current and possible future participation in school life?

Health Promoting Schools require supportive communities, and the concept of the HPS includes this idea of the school linked to its wider community and environment. The surrounding environment of the school may reflect the values being developed in the school and vice versa, and positive attention is advocated for relationships between the school and the community, and particularly with the parents of pupils (Senior, 2012). Despite some examples of good practice in this area of parents' participation in Irish schools (Lahiff & Nic Gabhainn, 1997; Nic Gabhainn &

Kelleher, 1998), there is a general dearth of understanding regarding how such participation can be encouraged and supported and specifically what the view of educational stakeholders such as children and parents are about parental participation. There is a need to investigate and understand how parents would like to participate in school life. In addition, as children are encouraged to express their views in school and on matters that affect them (e.g., UN, 1989), children's views on how or if they want their parents to participate in their school is also required. This study therefore sought to investigate the views of parents and children in Irish primary schools on parental participation in school and asked the research question: to what extent do parents and children agree on the issue of parents' current and possible future participation in schools?

## **2.12 Effect of parents' participation in school**

Involving parents in school generally, and/or in school health promotion and prevention programs has a number of potential benefits. These include improved attitudes of pupils to school, better health outcomes and behaviours for children and youth, improved communications between the school and the home, enhanced communication between parents and their children and reinforcement of health promoting messages. For example, it has been implied that parents' engagement in school or their child's education may have a positive impact on school-related outcomes (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Hill & Taylor, 2004), such as improvement in children's attitudes to school and academic performance (e.g., Anderson & Minke, 2007; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Feuerstein, 2000; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994), decreases in the number of high school dropouts, and increases in timely completion of school and completion of the highest grade levels (Barnard, 2004), and willingness to devote more attention, enthusiasm and commitment to learning (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems & Doan Holbein, 2005). In addition, it has been suggested that children are more responsive to learning and to progress academically when motivated by parents (Ingram *et al.*, 2007), and assume more accountability for their study when parents are involved (Gonzalez-DeHass *et al.*, 2005). However, while various associations have been reported, more research is required to identify the contributory evidence on how parents' involvement has improved pupils' learning (Mattingly, Prislín, McKenzie, Rodriguez & Kayzar, 2002).

The potential positive effect of good interactions between schools and parents on developing home-school relationships and school activities has been highlighted (Senior, 2012; St. Leger *et al.*, 2010). Also interactions between families, communities, and schools could impact on children's development (El Nokali, Bachman & Votruba-Drzal, 2010), school achievement, and improvement of school programmes (Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004), which creates a positive holistic environment that could support children's development and learning (Mattingly *et al.*, 2002). Models of child development have emphasised the vital role of parents in their child's education, and research on parents' involvement in school, and the relationship between schools and parents, has suggested that it is essential for promoting school achievement (e.g., Mattingly *et al.*, 2002) and children's academic and non-academic success (Doucet, 2011). For example, many studies have documented a link between parental involvement with children's education and academic achievement or improvement in student learning (e.g., Barnard, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Topor, Keane, Shelton & Calkins, 2010), an increase in school attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon, 2007), and the development of children's social competences (Kohl, Lengua & McMahon, 2000). Parental participation is important for strengthening and sustaining the concept of school health promotion but little is written on the processes involved. This also informed the research question: what are the views of parents and children about parents' current and possible future participation in school?

#### **2.14 Study research questions**

The aim or the purpose of a research study is connected to the research questions and methods (Pommier *et al.*, 2010). When conducting research, research questions are useful for fixing boundaries, making explicit the direction and focus of the study (Punch, 2005; Punch, 2014; Teddlie & Tashakorri, 2009) and reducing the purpose of the study into specific questions that the study seeks to answer (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Research questions are also necessary to guide the organisation and reporting of the research and to connect the research purpose to the research methods and findings (Plano Clark & Badiee, 2010).

The research questions for this study were identified and generated based on the review of the literature on children and parents' participation in school life. This

approach has been suggested as the most conventional method to develop research questions (Plano Clark & Badiee, 2010). The research questions developed for this study were developed in response to gaps in knowledge in literature on children and parents' participation in school life. This study sought to add to the body of knowledge on children and parents' participation in school life by providing appropriate answers to the research questions posed.

The research questions for the study are stated below:

1. What are the definitions of participation in school life from children and parents' perspective?
2. What are the perceptions of pupils on participation in school life?
3. Are there associations between participation of pupils in school life and health and wellbeing outcome for pupils?
4. Are there associations between pupils' participation in school life and the socio-ecological environment of schools?
5. Are there associations between the school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcome for pupils?
6. What are the views of parents and children about parents' current and possible future participation in school life?
7. To what extent do parents and children agree on the issue of parents' current and possible future participation in school life?

### **2.15 Chapter summary**

Participation of children and parents in school, as demonstrated in this chapter, are important principles in the HPS concept and have the potential to influence outcomes for a health promotion intervention. The core goal of the HPS is the empowerment of the whole school environment, both for staff and students and at a collective level (Simovska, 2004; Barnekow *et al.*, 2006). In applying an ecological perspective to HPS, the entire school community is viewed from the perspective of people-environment interactions, within a certain period of time. The application of best practice from the ecological model to the school setting helps to clearly define prospective research on the principles of the Ottawa Charter. It has been implied that the structure of the school, in terms of school ethos and environment, child

participation in decision-making processes in the schools, relationship of the teachers with the pupils and school links with parents and the surrounding community, could encourage the adoption of a healthy lifestyle within the whole school community (e.g., Stewart-Brown, 2006; Barnekow *et al.*, 2006). This generates an important research area for HPS. ‘Participation’ and ‘Socio-ecological’ are theoretical concepts; this study sought to examine their relations to health and wellbeing and impact on schools. In order to authenticate the notion and describe the extent of children and parents’ participation in health promoting primary schools in Ireland, children and parents defined participation from their own perspectives; this definitional basis of the study was used to develop questionnaire items to assess children’s participation in school. In addition, a questionnaire was also developed to explore and understand how parents would like to participate in school. In order to provide suitable answers to the study research questions, the mixed methods sequential exploratory research design-instrument development model was considered the most appropriate research design for this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Methodology is defined “*as the framework that relates to the entire process of research*” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p.4).

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This methodology chapter outlines how the objectives of the study were carried out. It states the research design and describes the philosophical assumptions of the design chosen for the study. The chapter also explains the questionnaire design (see section 3.8.2), survey strategy/plan (the sample selection; procedure for data collection), data analysis, ethical considerations and other methodological issues. Ethical considerations are presented in section 3.9 of this chapter.

#### **3.2 Summary**

This study was undertaken in two phases. Workshops were held with primary school pupils - the purpose of these workshops was to facilitate a three-phase participatory research process (PRP) to actively engage pupils to gather their views about participation in school. Parents were also invited to document their perspectives about participation in school life through a questionnaire with three open questions. This qualitative research method represented the first phase of the study. In the connecting (link) phase, which connected the first phase of the study to the second phase, the conceptual descriptions of school participation gathered from pupils and parents were used to develop the survey instruments (Appendix 4) for the quantitative data collection. These descriptions of participation in school life from parents and pupils’ perspectives informed the main contents of the variables used to develop the data collection instruments. In the second phase of the study, a survey was conducted, using the developed questionnaires from the connecting phase, to assess the extent of children and parents’ participation in school life and associations with good outcomes in Health Promoting Schools (HPS).

### 3.3 Research design

Research design “refers to the plan of action that links the philosophical assumptions to specific methods” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p.4).

#### 3.3.1 Introduction

The research design of a study is conceptualised as the process of organising a research project from the commencement of the research with the aim of taking appropriate decisions that would result in the production of acceptable evidence in answer to the research questions (Gorard, 2010). Gorard (2010) suggested that the research hypotheses or assumptions should guide the decision for a suitable design. In order to adequately address the study aim and objectives, a mixed methods research (MMR) design, as outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), was considered the most suitable research design to provide appropriate answers to the research questions.

#### 3.3.2 Mixed methods approach

Mixed methods research is defined as,

*“A research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analysing, and mixing both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.”*

(Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p.5),

Mixed methods research goes beyond merely collecting and analysing both qualitative and quantitative data. It requires the ‘mixing’ or combination of both the qualitative and quantitative data to facilitate a more complete representation of the research problem or hypothesis than they would have done if dealt with individually

(Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) suggested that mixed methods presents broader evidence to answer a research question than individual qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

### 3.3.3 Philosophical assumptions for the research design

The history of mixed methods research dates back to over 50 years with initial attention on using more than one type of data collection methods, either diverse forms of quantitative data or combination of both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Mixed methods is considered a “*third methodological movement* (Hall, 2012, p.1) *or research paradigm*” (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007, p. 112), supplementing qualitative and quantitative research movements (Hall, 2012; Johnson & Gray, 2010; Johnson *et al.*, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). From the inception of philosophical paradigm discussions, various researchers have argued for or against mixed methods research and there has been substantial debate on philosophical foundations and questions surrounding the mixed methods approach (Hall, 2012; Creswell, 2010). In addition, diverse views on the qualitative and quantitative paradigms in a mixed methods research have been proposed (e.g., Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Creswell, 2010). It has been suggested that pragmatism, which argues that both qualitative and quantitative research methods can be carried out in a single study (emphasising a single paradigm approach), could represent the best philosophical foundation for mixed methods research (e.g., Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). In other words, mixed methods research is considered as a separate paradigm (e.g. Creswell, 2003; Johnson *et al.*, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) or a research design with philosophical assumptions that includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. Recent arguments by Gorard (2010) have, however, disputed the assumption that MMR is a research design. Rather, mixed methods have been related to (or described in terms of) approaches that would be taken to carry out research (Gorard, 2010).

The theory that underpins a mixed methods research presumes that the collection and analysis of data consists of the combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Philosophical assumptions that guide mixed methods research highlight the

combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods in the phases of a research process and the direction in which data will be collected and analysed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The fundamental argument for the use of mixed methods research design is that combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a project gives the researcher a clearer understanding of the research questions rather than using either method individually (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

#### 3.3.4 Philosophical worldviews

It has been suggested that attention to the philosophical assumptions of paradigms or worldviews are vital to social science investigations (Greene & Hall, 2010). Although the debate on the paradigm stance for MMR is still on-going (e.g., Johnson *et al.*, 2007) and various philosophical or epistemological assumptions have been proposed, the philosophical stance or position that was chosen to support or guide the use of the mixed methods design in this study is pragmatism. Pragmatism is considered as an important worldview or paradigm for mixed methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Greene & Hall, 2010; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Pragmatism assumes a single paradigm stance that includes both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Hall, 2012). Pragmatism highlights the significance of the research questions relative to the methods and uses different methods of data collection; it is concerned with “*what works*”, “*valuing both objective and subjective knowledge*” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p.26) and “*orients itself toward solving practical problems in the ‘real world’*” (Feilzer, 2010, p.8). To further explain a pragmatic philosophical position for mixed methods research, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) argued that both qualitative and quantitative methods could be applied to a single study but prominence should be placed on the research question over either the methods employed in the research or the philosophical assumption that underpins the method; this argument was also corroborated by Hall (2012). Based on this assumption, the research questions in this study were of primary importance in guiding the approach to collecting both qualitative and quantitative data and combining or mixing them. The first research question in this study represented the qualitative phase and provided a foundational basis for other research questions for the quantitative phase. As proposed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), as a type of sequential exploratory mixed methods design, the qualitative

phase was carried out first and followed by the quantitative phase; the two phases, qualitative and quantitative, were connected by using the qualitative data analysis and findings to develop an instrument for the quantitative phase to answer research questions 2-7.

### **3.4 The role of the research question in mixed methods research design**

In the literature concerning designing mixed methods research studies, the research question is considered necessary and research scholars have proposed two models that could guide the choice of a mixed methods research design: “*research questions dictate methods*” and “*research questions are the hub of the research process*” (Plano Clark & Badiee, 2010, p.278). The latter model, “*research questions are the hub of the research process*”, relates the research question to four research components - the research purpose, the theory and beliefs guiding the research, the methods and research validity; it also emphasises the logical or natural associations among these four components, and with the research question (Plano Clark & Badiee, 2010). The former model, “*research questions dictate methods*”, proposes that research questions are the driving force for mixed methods research and that they inform the choice of a method (Plano Clark & Badiee, 2010) or type of mixed methods research design. The former model is conceptualised from a pragmatic point of view and consigns methodological paradigms and preferences to a secondary position (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The pragmatic perspective that drives the choice of research design and methods based on “what works” for providing the most appropriate answer to the research question (Biesta, 2010; Greene & Hall, 2010) were the guiding framework for the mixed methods design chosen for this study.

### **3.5 The factors that underline the choice of the mixed methods research strategy**

In outlining the research design and rationale for the selection of the mixed methods research strategy used for this study, three factors were taken into consideration. These three factors are explained in detail below:

1. **Timing (Implementation):** The ‘timing’ of the data can be described in terms of the time or period the data is collected (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) described timing as “*the order in which the researchers use the results from the two sets of data within a study*” (p.65). The researcher can collect and analyse both the quantitative and qualitative data at the same period (concurrently) or in phases (sequentially) (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In collecting the data in phases, either the quantitative or qualitative data can be collected first. In this study, the data was collected sequentially with the collection of the qualitative data first. The data generated from the qualitative phase then provided the information used to develop the instruments for the quantitative phase.

2. Weighting (Priority): As a factor that is considered in the choice of a strategy, weighting or priority decision refers to the emphasis given to either the quantitative or the qualitative approach during the process of data collection. The priority can either be equal for both approaches or one approach might be considered to have a greater priority than the other (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann and Hanson, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Several factors affect the weighting decision in a study. These factors could include the theoretical worldview that guides the study design (e.g. Morse, 1991); (the theoretical perspective was proposed by Creswell (2003) as a fourth criteria for choosing a mixed methods approach), the researcher’s interest, available resources, the study audience (for example, proposed journal interest, professional community and so on) (e.g., Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) or the approach that can best address the study research questions. In this study, the research questions included questions that would require both qualitative and quantitative approach. The pragmatic worldview argues for either equal or unequal weighting to be placed on the qualitative and quantitative method as directed or guided by the research questions for the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Thus, the weighting decision in this study was influenced by the pragmatic worldview with emphasis on the best approach that was needed to adequately provide answers to the research questions. Equal weighting was given to both approaches; variables from the qualitative phase, which included conceptualisations and descriptions of school participation from children and parents perspectives, were used to develop instruments for the quantitative

phase. Therefore, the qualitative phase was not considered less or more important than the quantitative phase of the study.

3. **Mixing (Integration):** A third consideration that was used for choosing the mixed methods research design in this study is related to how the qualitative and quantitative data would be ‘mixed’ or integrated. This is referred to as the ‘mixing’ of the data. Creswell (2003) highlighted that the integration or mixing of the quantitative and qualitative data can occur at different stages of the study; the data collection, data analysis, interpretation stages or some combination of places. Creswell & Plano Clark (2007) further proposed three conceptual approaches for mixing both qualitative and quantitative data sets: merging both data sets, embedding one data within another or connecting both data. In this study, the qualitative method was connected to the quantitative method by collecting and analysing the qualitative data first and using the findings to develop an instrument for the quantitative phase.

Based on these three factors, timing, weighting and mixing decisions, the ‘sequential exploratory design-instrument development model’ (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) was chosen as the mixed methods design for this study. The pragmatic implications of using the exploratory design is that because of the two separate phases involved, it makes it straightforward to implement and it can be easily reported (Creswell, 2003, Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Also, the design of this model can be easily applied in single and multi-stage research studies. However, it has been argued that this strategy needs an extensive time to be implemented, because of the two stages of data collection involved.

### **3.6 Sequential exploratory design; instrument development model**

#### **3.6.1 Sequential exploratory design**

The sequential exploratory mixed methods research design (Creswell, 2003; Creswell *et al.*, 2003) or two-phase exploratory design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) or sequential exploratory strategy (Creswell, 2003) was proposed by Creswell *et al.* (2003).

The sequential exploratory design is a two-stage design in which the results of the qualitative phase are built into the quantitative data (Creswell, 2009; 2003; Creswell

& Plano Clark, 2007). This design involves collecting and analysing the qualitative data in the first phase, and using the findings from the qualitative data to either develop an instrument (instrument development model) or to establish essential variables or emergent categories to study quantitatively on a particular phenomenon (taxonomy development model) (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

### 3.6.2 The variant of the sequential exploratory design used in this study

The sequential exploratory design- instrument development model was considered the most appropriate mixed methods approach for this study. In using this approach (e.g., Tashiro, 2002), the data from the first phase (qualitative phase) of the study were used to design the quantitative instrument to assess the extent of children and parents' participation in Health Promoting Schools at the second phase (quantitative phase) (see Figure 3.1). The variables that were used to develop the quantitative instrument connect the qualitative and quantitative method (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). It has been suggested that investigators using the instrument development model underscore the quantitative aspect of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). However, in this study, equal weighting or priority was given to both approaches. Figure 3.2 outlines the overall study design.

## 3.7 Sampling technique

In this study, both probability and purposive sampling techniques were combined as stipulated by the research questions. The mixing of these two sampling techniques by a researcher, to answer the research questions in a study, is a defining feature of a mixed methods research (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008; Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

In selecting the sample size in a mixed methods research, and as carried out in this study, the goal is to choose samples that are representative of the sample population – this is especially necessary when collecting quantitative data sets (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Normally, the mixed methods research produces both numeric and narrative data. Several sample sizes might be employed in a study depending on whether the research question(s) requires multiple or individual methods (e.g., quantitative or qualitative). Samples could differ in size depending on the research methodology and research questions.

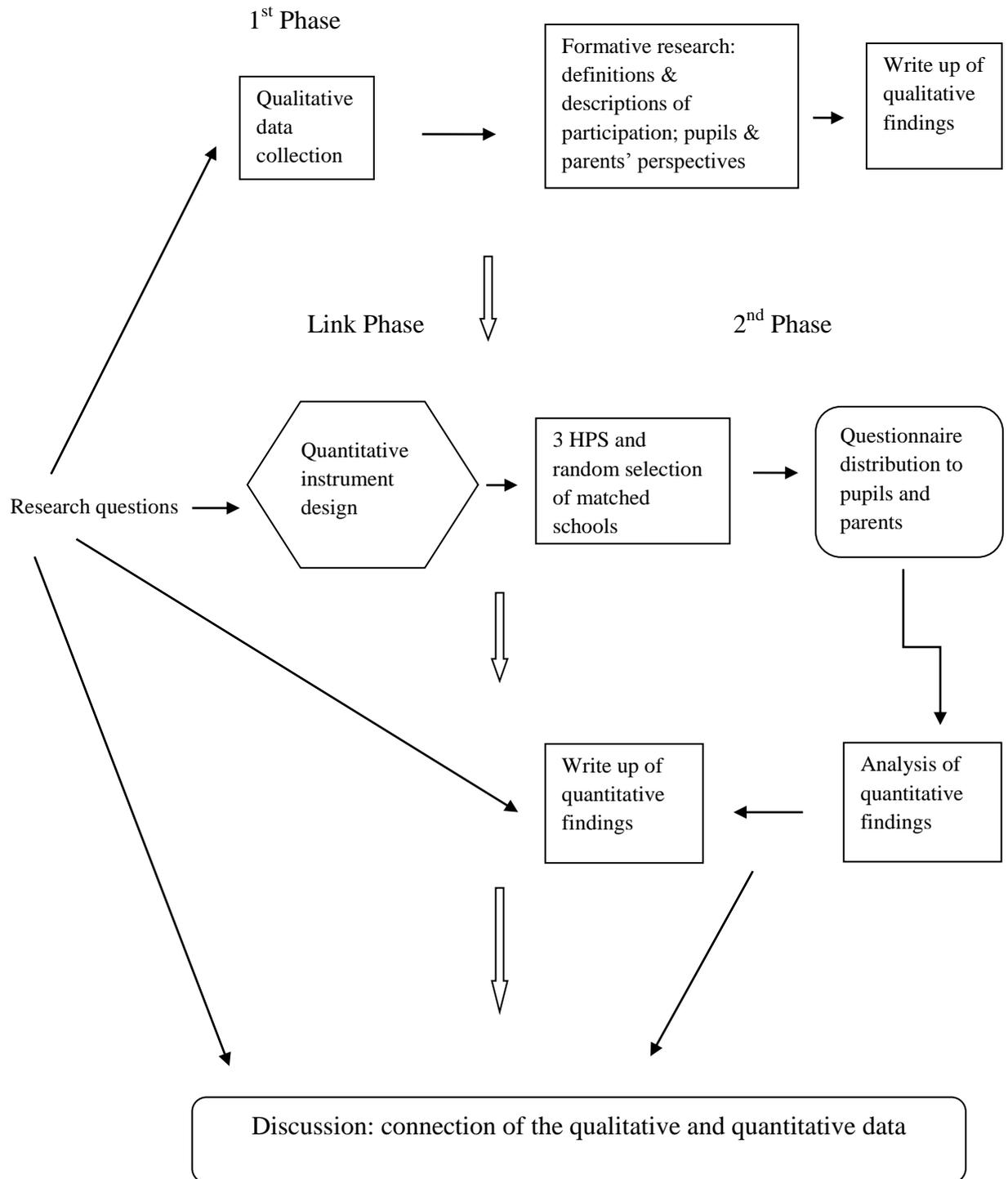
**Figure 3.1 Diagram showing the Sequential Exploratory Design-instrument development model**

Phase One			Link Phase	Phase Two		
Qual* data Collection	⇒ Qual data Analysis	⇒ Qual data Findings	⇒ Develop instrument	⇒ Quant** data collection	⇒ Quant data Analysis	⇒ Quant data Findings
<b>Procedures:</b> <i>Pupils</i> Participatory research process (n=248)	<b>Procedures:</b> <i>Pupils</i> Categories developed	<b>Procedures:</b> <i>Pupils</i> Labelled categories	<b>Procedures:</b> <i>Pupils</i> Descriptions of participation used to develop questionnaire items	<b>Procedures:</b> <i>Pupils</i> Survey with developed instrument including demographic items (n=231)	<b>Procedures:</b> <i>Pupils</i> Scale reliability Hypothesis testing Logistic regression	<b>Procedures:</b> <i>Pupils</i> Measures of school participation, school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes
<i>Parents</i> One-on-one contact: Open-ended 3short question items (n=39)	<i>Parents</i> Categories developed	<i>Parents</i> Description of categories	<i>Parents</i> Most common categories as questionnaire items	<i>Parents</i> Survey with developed instrument including demographic items (n=218)	<i>Parents</i> Percentages Frequencies Emergent themes and sub-categories from open question	<i>Parents</i> Extent of parents' school participation Emergent themes for parents' participation in school
<b>Products:</b> <i>Pupils</i> Short responses on small coloured papers	<b>Products:</b> <i>Pupils</i> Descriptive labels generated for each category	<b>Products:</b> <i>Pupils</i> Schematic presentation of data	<b>Products:</b> <i>Pupils</i> 66 items across 11 scales	<b>Products:</b> <i>Pupils</i> Numerical item scores	<b>Products:</b> <i>Pupils</i> Cronbach alpha Relative Odds (95% CI)	<b>Products:</b> <i>Pupils</i> Mean scores Associations between dependent and independent variables
<i>Parents</i> Short responses-text data	<i>Parents</i> Number of parents for each category	<i>Parents</i> Most occurring categories	<i>Parents</i> 4 items; 1 scale	<i>Parents</i> 3 closed and one open question	<i>Parents</i> Percentages by gender and school type Coding of themes	<i>Parents</i> Description of actions for parents' participation in school

**Notes:** Source: Adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007, p. 53;

\*Qualitative (Qual); \*\*Quantitative (Quant).

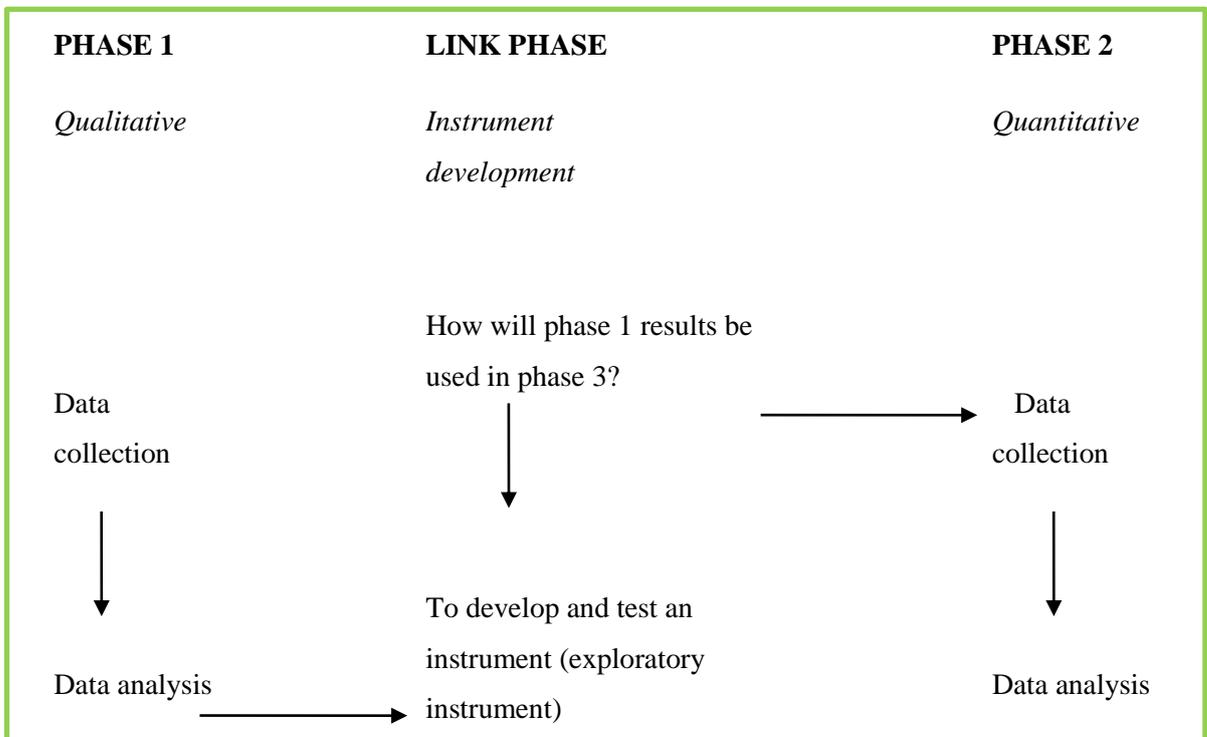
**Figure 3.2 Overall study mixed methods design**



### 3.8 Data collection methods and analysis

For the purpose of collecting data in this study, the sequential MMR design was conceptualised as having two phases (e.g., Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007): the qualitative phase (phase 1 - data collection and analysis) and the quantitative phase (phase 2 - data collection and analysis). The instrument development represented the link phase (phase 1 data was used to develop instrument for phase 2). Figure 3.3 outlines the two-phase process of the sequential data collection.

**Figure 3.3 Sequential phases of exploratory instrument development model data collection**



Adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007, p. 122

### 3.8.1 Phase 1: Qualitative phase

#### *a. Data collection methods*

##### Pupils - Participatory Research Process (PRP)

Participatory research differs from conventional research in that it focuses more on carrying out research *with* people, and less on carrying out research *on* people (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). The methods involved in carrying out participatory research centre on involving research participants in the research process, while at the same time building their research capacity (Krishnaswamy, 2004). The PRP has been previously used with young children; it involves children in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data (Nic Gabhainn & Sixsmith, 2006). PRP is entirely a group-based process and thus, does not capture the views of individual participants; the PRP generates very large amounts of data at various levels, which can be challenging to manage and requires appropriate data efficiency. Nevertheless PRP was considered preferable to other possible qualitative research techniques for this study because the approach mirrors the topic being investigated (i.e., participation), it has the potential to increase the capacity of research participants (pupils), and most importantly it removes the adult filter inherent in the analysis of most forms of qualitative data. The PRP is a three-stage process that involves participants in generating, categorising and analysing the data. The PRP can encourage the active participation of participants in all aspects of the research process and they are given a free hand to generate, categorise and analyse the data with limited interference.

##### Parents' short questionnaire

The intention in this study was to involve stakeholders, for example, pupils and parents directly in the research process; this was achieved by facilitating pupils and parents to develop definitions and descriptions of the key concept of school participation that was explored. However, because of the challenge in accessing groups of parents for involvement in the PRP, a questionnaire with three open questions was used to collect parents' perspectives on school participation.

## *b. Participant selection*

### Pupils

For the qualitative phase of this study, a probability simple random sampling technique was used to select pupil participants. The list of national primary schools in Galway city, in the west of Ireland, was obtained from the Irish Department of Education. First, three schools were randomly selected from the Department of Education list; an additional six extra schools were randomly selected in the event of any of the first three schools' unwillingness to participate. Initially, telephone calls were made to each of the first three schools but all of them declined to take part. Telephone calls were then made to each of the additional six schools (the first school was randomly selected and the pattern followed consecutively). The first three schools who gave their consent to participate among the six schools were selected for the study. All the three schools that participated were co-educational. Introductory telephone calls were followed up with information letters posted to the schools. In each of the three selected schools, all pupils in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class were purposely selected to participate in the study. This group of pupils were selected because they have spent more years in the school and therefore know the nature of the school. In terms of experience, they have also had more interactions with children in other schools.

Although probability sampling techniques are normally affiliated to quantitative studies, which usually involve selecting a representative sample from a defined population (e.g., Teddlie & Yu, 2007), the goal of this qualitative phase was not to generalise the findings but to ensure the random selection of participating schools within the sample frame (the sample frame for the qualitative phase consisted of all national primary schools in Galway city).

### Parents

A purposive sampling technique was used to select parent participants. The initial aim was to randomly select a group of parents in each of the three schools to take part in a PRP to document parents' perspectives on school. After various unsuccessful attempts to access parents through the schools, the sampling strategy and research design, for parents, was changed. Parent participants were approached

at the school gate while waiting to collect their children during the closing period. An average of 13 parents per school participated across each of the three schools.

### *c. Questionnaire pilot process*

Questions were pilot tested with four pupils in 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> class aged 10 to 14 years for clarity and understanding before the research process was carried out. As indicated in literature, there are different terms used to describe the concept of pupil participation - such as *'involvement'*, *'linked to the students'* and *'student-directed'* (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006). During the pilot process and in order to determine the appropriate language with which to describe the concept of pupil participation, a consensus was reached on the term *'feel a part of'* following feedback from these young people about how they understood the word *'participation'* in school.

### *d. Procedure for data collection and analysis*

#### Inclusion/exclusion criteria

In each of the three selected schools, the pupil participants included only those in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class who consented to participate by signing a consent form, and who were given parental consent. Pupils who were not in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> class and those who were eligible but did not sign a consent form or signified verbally that they did not want to take part in the study were not included. All parents who had a child or children in the primary schools were approached to participate in the study.

#### Pupils

It is the responsibility of a researcher to ensure that all research participants are adequately informed, given all necessary information about the study, and assure all participants have adequate understanding of the research (DCYA, 2012). In this study, after initial greetings and at the beginning of each stage of the PRP, the study objectives were introduced to the pupils; the procedure for carrying out the research was explained to them and the confidentiality of the data they provided was assured. Pupils were given an opportunity to ask questions, if they needed any clarifications, throughout the process.

As shown in Table 3.1, data were collected from pupils using the PRP in three phases and each phase was carried out with separate class groups in each of the three schools. At least three class groups were required for the PRP. The school selected the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> class groups that participated at each phase of the research process, and this was based on the availability of each of the classes at the time allotted for each stage of the research process. In one of the schools, two classes were merged because of the small number of pupils in one of the classes. In the first school, two 6<sup>th</sup> classes and one 5<sup>th</sup> class took part in the PRP; in the second school, two 5<sup>th</sup> classes and one 6<sup>th</sup> class took part in the research; in the third school, one 5<sup>th</sup> class, one 4<sup>th</sup> class and two classes merged (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>) into one class took part in the PRP (see Table 3.1).

#### 1. Phase 1: data generation

In each of the three schools, the first group of pupils were asked to give their responses to the following two questions: “*What makes you feel a part of the school?*” and “*If it was your job to make sure everybody in your school felt a part of the school, what would you do?*” Pupils were encouraged to provide as many responses as they wanted; each response was written on separate pieces of rectangular coloured paper, similar to index cards.

#### 2. Phase 2: data analysis

The analysis of the data was inductive. The second group of pupils took the responses given by the first group on pieces of coloured paper and categorised them by playing a version of the card game ‘Snap’. All the individual responses were first dealt out to group members, so each had a pile of written responses to work with. The youngest pupil present placed the first piece of coloured paper (response) on the table, face up, for everybody to see. Others in the group looked through their own piles, and if they found a response that they perceived to be the same or similar to the one already on the table, they placed theirs on top to form a category. The game continued with similar responses being put together and different categories emerging until all the cards were used. Pupils then double-checked all developed categories to ensure they were satisfied with them. Descriptive labels were generated by the group members for each category, and the responses that made up the category with the label were stapled together. Group members were free to add responses and alter categories if they wished.

### 3. Phase 3: data presentation/analysis

The final group of pupils were given the labelled groups of categories as developed by the second group and asked to create a schematic presentation of the data. To aid in that process they were supplied with coloured paper (size A0), adhesive and coloured pens. The group members were free to add categories if they wished. The groups took the labelled categories and looked through the responses under each label to help them understand the meaning of each category. After reviewing the categories group members used adhesive to attach category labels to the large sheets of coloured paper in the way that that they felt represented *'feeling a part of school'*. Some of the groups also chose to write on the coloured paper.

At the end of each stage of the research process, pupils were asked as a form of feedback on their opinion about the research process and if they enjoyed it. Across all three schools, pupils responded that they were happy with the process and thought that it was fun. The researchers also observed that the pupils enjoyed each stage of the research process and it encouraged the group process.

#### Parents

A short open three-question questionnaire was developed to gather information from parents (Appendix 4). The parents' questions were analogous to those of the pupils. The purpose of the research was explained to them after the researcher had completed necessary introductions and obtained consent to participate. Parents were asked to sign a consent form if they preferred, but most parents chose to give verbal consent before completing the questionnaire. Confidentiality and anonymity of information given was assured to parents. Parents were made aware that participation in the study was voluntary and they were free to withdraw from the study at any point. Parents were thanked verbally after completing the questionnaires. Data collected from parents were analysed thematically.

This qualitative (first phase) provided answers to the first research question and the findings are documented in the first journal article (Taking Part in School Life: Views of Children).

Table 3.1: Characteristics of the three-phase PRP process

N=248	School I	School II	School III
Phase 1 ↓	6 <sup>th</sup> class; n=44 (2 class groups merged)	6 <sup>th</sup> class; n=24	5 <sup>th</sup> class; n=29
	No sub-groups	No sub-groups	No sub-groups
	All answered Q1 (98 responses) All answered Q2 (85 responses)	All answered Q1 (88 responses) All answered Q2 (146 responses)	All answered Q1 (91 responses) All answered Q2 (123 responses)
	Individual Responses gathered together and brought to Phase 2 classes		
Phase 2 ↓	5 <sup>th</sup> Class; n = 24	5 <sup>th</sup> Class; n = 29	6 <sup>th</sup> Class; n = 25
	4 sub-groups	4 sub-groups	4 sub-groups
	Sub_group A and B categorised the answers to Q1 into 10 categories Sub_groups C and D categorised the answers to Q2 into 14 categories	Sub_group A and B categorised the answers to Q1 into 17 categories Sub_groups C and D categorised the answers to Q2 into 27 categories	Sub_group A and B categorised the answers to Q1 into 15 categories Sub_groups C and D categorised the answers to Q2 into 17 categories
	Categories gathered together and brought to Phase 3 classes		
Phase 3	5 <sup>th</sup> class; n = 21	4 <sup>th</sup> class; n = 28	4 <sup>th</sup> &5 <sup>th</sup> class; n = 24
	3 sub-groups	5 sub-groups	4 sub-groups
	Sub_group A examined and revised the original 10 categories developed from Q1 answers and developed 1 schema to represent them; an additional schema was developed from new categories by the group  Sub_groups B and C examined and revised the original 14 categories developed from Q2 answers and developed 2 schema to represent them	Sub_group A and B examined and revised the original 17 categories developed from Q1 answers and developed 2 schema to represent them  Sub_groups C, D and E examined and revised the original 27 categories developed from Q2 answers and developed 3 schema to represent them	Sub_group A and B examined and revised the original 15 categories developed from Q1 answers and developed 2 schema to represent them  Sub_groups C and D examined and revised the original 17 categories developed from Q2 answers and developed 2 schema to represent them

### 3.8.2 Link phase: Instrument development/Questionnaire design

A questionnaire has been referred to as an important research instrument, measurement or tool for data collection, which could include open-ended or close-ended questions (Oppenheim, 1992). It has been suggested that “*questionnaire design and development must be supported by a logical, systematic and structured approach*” (Rattray & Jones, 2007, p.234). Following the Sequential Exploratory Design-instrument development model (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) for this study, the quantitative data instrument was informed and developed from the qualitative data analysis and findings; thus, connecting the quantitative data to the qualitative data.

#### Pupils

After the analysis of the qualitative data from pupils, nine main concepts/themes (‘You’; ‘Your school’ - School perception and School policy; ‘School activities’; ‘School events’; ‘Your class’; ‘Taking part in school’; ‘Your teacher’; ‘Bullying in school’) were generated from the findings from pupils’ conceptualisations of participation in school life, and one from parents (‘About Parents’); making a total of ten concepts from the qualitative phase. Two concepts (‘Health and wellbeing’ and ‘School rules’) were included from other literature (Currie *et al.*, 2012). Concepts from a “*framework for monitoring and evaluating children’s participation*”, which was an introductory draft for piloting (Lansdown, 2011) developed at the same period the quantitative instrument was being designed, were considered. Based on comparing the findings from the qualitative data to the literature and Lansdown’s framework, other concepts that were not generally highlighted by pupils in the qualitative data for example ‘School rules’; ‘Your health’ were also included in the quantitative instruments. Further detail on the process of questionnaire development can be found in Appendix 3.

The pupils’ questionnaire consisted of a total of 85 questions divided into thirteen sections; all the questions were structured with 4 or 5 response scale options (a check box response format was used and respondents were asked to tick one box for each question) with 4 open-ended questions (see Appendix 4). The sections included demographic characteristics of pupils (gender, age, class), perception of school, school policy, school activities, school events, school rules, class, taking part in

school, teacher(s), health and wellbeing, bullying and parents' participation in school (see Appendix 4).

### Parents

The four questions included in the parents' questionnaire were based on the main categories that emerged from the analysis of parents' perspectives on participation in school life, and how they thought that parents could be encouraged to participate in school life. Taking this approach helped to ensure that the key issues could be investigated in an efficient and parent-friendly manner using a short questionnaire which parents found quick to complete. Parents were invited to respond to questions on school activities, feeling part of school, encouragement to talk about child and suggest best ways they would like to take part in school (see Appendix 4). Pupils also completed analogous questions about their parents' participation in school life.

#### 3.8.3 Phase 2: Quantitative phase

##### *a. Participants selection*

The study participants (parents and children) for the second phase (quantitative) were different from those who participated in the first phase (qualitative). It has been hypothesised that the number of study participants in the quantitative phase of an exploratory MMR design is usually greater than those in the qualitative phase because a representative sample of participants from a defined/specific population are required to generalise the findings from the quantitative phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). However, in this study, the qualitative and quantitative studies are two separate, sequential studies, and therefore the selection of the samples was carried out independently. However, the quantitative study links to the qualitative study through the development of the survey instrument.

The sample frame for this part of the study was pupils in primary schools in Galway County (West of Ireland) and their parents. Participant selection for the survey involved the purposive selection of three HPS (primary) and random selection of six non-HPS (NHPS). The Health Promotion Department (HPD) of the Health Services Executive (West) were approached to help in the selection of primary schools that were currently actively engaging with the HPS principles, with the support of professional Health Promotion staff. These three schools that were selected based on the recommendation of the HPD had been actively engaged with the HPS principles

for more than a year. One was an all-boys school, the second an all-girls school and the third a mixed school - they therefore represented the HPS component of the study.

Each HPS was matched by gender and location (i.e., urban/rural) against two other primary schools (non-HPS/NHPS) in Galway county randomly selected from the Department of Education primary school list, thus making a total of nine schools. In each of the nine schools, pupils in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> class and their parents were invited to participate in the study. Each class consisted of an average of 20 pupils in urban locations, with an average of one to two classes per class year; schools in rural locations had an average of 10 pupils or fewer in each class year.

#### *b. Piloting process*

Three key steps were taken to pilot the survey instrument. Initially, the questionnaire was reviewed by two researchers in the Health Promotion Research Centre who are working on children's research. Their suggestions and comments on clarity and question format informed revisions to the questionnaires. The questionnaires were then piloted in a primary school with pupils from 4th, 5th and 6th class (ages 10-12 years) - a similar population to the participants in the main study. An information sheet about the study was provided to the school, teacher and pupils. Pupils were also informed that all the information from the questionnaire would be kept confidential, that taking part in the pilot was totally voluntary and that they did not have to answer any question they did not want to, or, indeed, to take part at all. The pilot questionnaires were self-administered and pupils were informed that filling in each pilot questionnaire could take about 20 minutes, but this was one of the things that required testing. A total of 27 primary school pupils participated in the pilot study.

After completing the questionnaire pupils were asked how well they understood the questionnaire, if there were any difficult words and how long it took them to complete the questionnaire (the time that each pupil returned their completed questionnaire was also recorded on their sheets). Based on feedback from the pupils, ambiguous questions were either reframed or removed and difficult words were reworded. Thirdly, the pilot questionnaire was again given to colleagues to validate the

questions after revision. Further comments and suggestions were used to revise the questionnaires before data collection.

*c. Procedure for data collection*

Inclusion/exclusion criteria

In the nine schools, only pupils who were in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class and their parents were included in the survey. Only pupils whose parents gave consent, and who themselves also assented to participate by signing a consent form, completed the questionnaire. Only parents who signed the consent forms were considered eligible for inclusion in the survey.

Survey data collection

Information sheets (for students, schools, teachers and parents), consent forms (for students and parents) and letters (to school and parents) were developed (see Appendix 4). The Health Promotion Department (HPD) of the Health Services Executive (West) offered to telephone and invite the three HPS to participate in the research. After agreement to participate, introduction letters and information sheets were sent to the schools by post. In recruiting the other six schools, first introductory telephone calls were made to the Principals of the schools explaining the research and details of the data collection process. On agreement to participate, introduction letters and information sheets were sent to the schools by post (see Appendix 4). The schools were assured that all necessary procedures to ensure the data collection was convenient for the school would be followed.

All the nine schools requested that the survey instruments and all other related documents be posted to them and the teachers would help in the distribution. This was to ensure less interruption with the school schedule. Parents (each pack contained an introductory letter to parents, information sheet, consent form(s) and questionnaire) and pupils' packs (enclosed in each pack was an information sheet, consent form and questionnaire) were posted to the schools, including reminder notes for parents (see Appendix 4). Survey checklist forms to identify the number of packs, questionnaires, information sheets and consent forms for each school and class were also sent to the schools. In addition, class information forms to identify number of pupils in each class, number of pupils who completed questionnaires and

those absent were also included. Information sheets containing guidelines for teachers to follow in carrying out the survey in the classroom were also posted to each school (see Appendix 4). Each class in each of the nine schools had a separate pack of survey documents to reduce workload and stress on the school and teachers. Freepost envelopes were included for the return of parents and pupils' questionnaires.

Parents were given a week to return the consent forms (for themselves and children) and questionnaire (parents) to the class teacher. Reminder letters to parents were sent home with pupils at mid-week. Thank you letters were sent by post to all participating schools on return of all completed questionnaires (for both parents and pupils).

#### *d. Data management and analysis*

Quantitative data analysis usually involves the use of statistical data analysis packages or software to answer the research question posed in the study or to test research hypothesis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

#### Parents: methodological approach to analysis

##### 1. Introduction

Parents and pupils completed analogous questions about parents' participation in school life. In order to address and provide answers to research question 6 and 7, this part of the analysis compared parents' and pupils' data. The quantitative data were coded (see Appendix 8) and entered into SPSS version 20. Parents' and pupils' data were merged in the SPSS file and data screening and checking were carried out before further data analysis was carried out. Frequencies were generated for the quantitative data. The qualitative data, comprising the responses to the open-ended question for both parents (n=218) and pupils (n=231) were imported into Microsoft Excel for coding. A conventional approach to content analysis was used to analyse the data, which was informed by Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen (2008) and May (2011) and followed the procedures outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). Categories that were related to the context of parents' participation in school were developed from parents' and pupils' data.

Analysis for both the pupils' and parents' responses to the open-ended question involved three stages of coding from which various themes emerged. The themes were given definitions, and were subsequently categorised into variables that represented actions that could be carried out by either parents or schools. Some parents and children gave multiple responses, and thus the numbers in each category, or sub-category, do not necessarily sum to the total number of respondents.

## 2. Stage one coding

For the first stage of coding, pupils' and parents' data were treated separately. However, given that many of the same themes emerged, some codes were shared between the two datasets. The major themes focused on actions that could be carried out directly by schools or by parents. These included how parents had participated in school life in the past, statements about whether the respondents were happy with the current participation of parents in school life and schools inviting parents to be involved in school.

At this stage, sixteen codes were generated for pupils and fifteen for parents. For both parents and pupils, the largest single response code was 'active' actions for parents (parents 32.1%; pupils 38.5%). A range of other coded responses emerged including '*happy with level of involvement in school*', '*school invite parents to engage*', '*school give parents information*', '*school organise events to engage parents*', '*teachers to improve communication with parents*', '*examples of how parents had participated in school*', '*examples of how parents had supported child*' and '*parents do not get involved in school*' (see Appendix 7).

## 3. Stage two coding

At the second stage of coding, the codes generated during the first stage were reviewed to further refine and specify themes. Some were expanded and merged, while others were divided and contracted; following this process there were eleven themes drawn from the pupils' data and nine from the parents. Definitions of all themes were developed at this stage (see Table 3 in journal article 4).

## 4. Stage three coding

At the third and final stage, sub-categories were developed from the 'active actions for parents' theme. These were responses from parents and pupils that focused on specific actions expected of parents. Ten sub-categories emerged from pupils'

responses and nine sub-categories came from parents' responses (see Table 4 in journal article 4).

#### 5. Check for reliability of data coding

The consistency of the data coding was assessed by inter-rater reliability. At least two independent assessors are required to measure the inter-rater reliability of a set of codes. Ten percent each of the parents and pupils' qualitative data statements were randomly selected using a random number generator. An independent colleague was invited and given these data, and asked to determine which theme or sub-category each response falls into. The percentage of agreement between the researcher and the independent colleague was calculated to determine the rate of agreement. The coding had an 87% (pupils' data) and 85% (parents' data) inter-rater reliability rate.

### Pupils: data management and analysis process

#### 1. Introduction

On the return of questionnaires from schools, questionnaires were checked for completeness and omissions. The criterion for inclusion of questionnaires in analysis was to remove questionnaires that had three or more sections that were not completed. Three respondents did not complete two sections and two respondents did not complete one section in their questionnaires. These respondents were, however, included in the data analysis because the uncompleted sections were different and their inclusion did not affect the data set. A coding guide was developed (Appendix 8) for the questionnaire and data was entered and analysed using IBM SPSS version 20. Prior to carrying out data analysis, the data file was checked by another colleague, to compare the accuracy of the data entered with that of the survey questionnaires.

#### 2. Data screening and cleaning

Initial steps were taken to carry out preliminary analysis after all the data for the quantitative phase had been collected, coded and entered into the SPSS. The data set was checked for errors, missing data, outliers and so on; any errors identified in the data file were corrected and missing values checked.

### *Checking for errors*

The primary aim of checking for errors in the data set was to identify through all the variables any value that fell outside the range of possible values (Pallant, 2010). In order to detect these values, frequencies and descriptive statistics were run on SPSS for both categorical and continuous variables respectively. Minimum and maximum values were checked to ensure they were within the normal range of the variables. In addition, the number of valid and missing cases (e.g., systems missing) was inspected. Also, mean values were generated to detect if there were any values out-of-range. Some minor errors were detected, identified in the data file and corrected. Frequencies and descriptive analysis were repeated to ensure accuracy and that all values were within the correct range for each variable in the questionnaire.

### *Checking for missing data*

It is required to identify any missing data before progressing with the data analysis. Decisions and appropriate actions must be taken to deal with any missing data in the data file (Oppenheim, 1992; Pallant, 2010). Oppenheim (1992) suggested that “*we need to satisfy ourselves as best we can that the reasons or causes for non-response or missing data are unconnected with the topics in our questionnaire, so that there are no ‘correlated biases’*” (p.280). While entering the data into SPSS, the data file was accurately programmed for missing values; the value ‘99’ was programmed into SPSS to represent any missing response from each questionnaire. After all the data had been entered, the data file was examined for any missing value by running descriptive statistics on SPSS; percentages of missing values were identified for each variable (see Table 1 in Appendix 2).

### *Checking for outliers*

“*An outlier is a case with such an extreme value on one variable (a univariate outlier) or such a strange combination of scores on two or more variables (multivariate outlier) that they distort statistics*” (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007, p.72; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001, p.66); they can also be described as cases with values that are far above or very much below other cases in the data set (Pallant, 2010). After calculating the total scores for the scales, all extreme outliers that were observed were checked for any errors in the data file. Questionnaires with very high extreme scores that were identified three or more times from the total scores for each

scale item were removed from the data file; questionnaires of respondents who had codes 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10 were in this category. Also, questionnaires that had very low extreme scores were also removed; questionnaires 55 and 208 fell into this category.

#### *Checking the reliability of scales*

Each scale item were checked for reliability to determine the scale's internal consistency; that is, the degree to which all the items that made up each scale measured the same underlying concept. It is argued that the 'uni-dimensionality' of scale items is essential in constructing Likert scales (Oppenheim, 1992, p.195). For the purpose of checking the internal consistency of the scales developed for this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (CAC) was computed using the reliability analysis function of the scale analysis in SPSS version 20. Cronbach's alpha coefficient value above .7 was considered acceptable for scales (e.g., DeVellis, 2003; Field, 2009; Pallant, 2010).

The first step taken before checking for the internal consistency of each scale was to reverse all negatively worded items. Thirteen scales, grouped under three broad measures (school participation, school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes) were then constructed for this study. Total scores were computed for each scale and normality of scores was assessed. Table 1 in Appendix 2 shows Cronbach's alpha coefficient values and explanations on the construction of the scales are shown in Appendix 9.

#### *Design effect (DEFF)*

Data were imported into EPI Info 3.5.4 using the complex sample function to compute the DEFF value for each variable item. The design effect (DEFF) of clustering among class groups in schools, which measures the ratio between the variance estimate of a data collected through cluster sampling against data collected through random sampling, was computed to find out the clustering effect of responses given within class groups. It is assumed that for an adequately designed study design effects, DEFF values could range between 1 and 3, although preferred DEFF values are close to 1 (Walsh, Molcho, Dineen, Kelleher & Nic Gabhainn, 2008). In this study, the DEFF values were ranged between 0.2 and 2 (see Table 1 in Appendix 2).

### *Check for multicollinearity*

This can be described in relation to whether variables are highly correlated ( $r=0.9$  and above) or not (Pallant, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The multicollinearity of the variables in this study was computed with the linear regression analysis using the collinearity diagnostic function on SPSS version 20. The correlations between the independent variables and the dependent variable (health and wellbeing) show some relationships. The correlations between each of the independent variables are not too high (see Appendix 10). The Tolerance value, which shows how much of the variability of a stated IV is not explained by other independent variables in the template (that is  $1-R^2$  for each variable) are higher than 0.10 (see Table 1 in Appendix 2), signifying that the multiple correlation with the other IV is low and so suggesting no possibility of multicollinearity (Pallant, 2010). In addition, the VIF (Variance inflation factor) values (the opposite of the Tolerance value= $1/\text{Tolerance}$ ), are all below the cut-off of 10 (see Table 1 in Appendix 2), thus giving no indication of multicollinearity (Pallant, 2010).

### 3. Measures

The working definition of participation in school employed in this study comprised the general participation of pupils in everyday school life (including school activities and school events), decision-making of pupils in school (for example, participation in making school rules), interpersonal relationships in the school environment, having a sense of belonging and ensuring equal participation of all pupils within the school.

#### *School participation*

School participation was measured with four scales, each assessing different dimensions of school participation. ‘Participation in school decisions and rules’ comprised a six-item scale (Cronbach’s Alpha (CAC) =0.646); ‘Participation in school activities’ comprised eight-items (CAC=0.604) (school activities were described in terms of activities that were part of every-day school life, for example, arts, physical education and music); ‘Participation in school events’ comprised six-items (CAC=0.623) (school events were described as special events organised by schools, for example, sports day) and ‘Positive perception of school participation’ scale contained six-items (CAC=0.772) (positive perception of school participation

were described in terms of pupils' perception of feeling happy about their level of participation school).

#### *School socio-ecological environment*

Based on the socio-ecological model, the questionnaire consisted of items on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, school policy and school community links. These question items were developed into scales with each scale measuring aspects of the school socio-ecological environment. The intrapersonal scale consisted of eight items measuring pupils' 'perception of school' (CAC=0.834). The interpersonal included three scales; 'perceptions of class relationships' (CA = 0.806), which had eight items and 'relationship with teacher' (CAC=0.886), which was made up of five items. The school policy scale comprised six items, which measured pupils' 'perception of school policy' (CAC=0.605) and the community scale with three items, assessed 'parents' participation in school life' (CAC=0.584).

#### *Pupil health and wellbeing*

Outcome measures comprised pupils' perceptions of their health and wellbeing and were measured using four questionnaire items; 'perceived general health', 'self-reported happiness', 'self-esteem' and 'life satisfaction'. These items were drawn from the 2010 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study (Currie *et al.*, 2012; DCYA, 2012). Perceived general health has four response options, self-reported happiness has four response options, and self-esteem has five response options and life satisfaction had eleven response options. The life satisfaction scale was collapsed into five groups and relabelled to ensure that life satisfaction did not have an undue influence on the overall scores. Each item was coded or recoded from low to high and then the individual scores of the four items were added together to collapse into a single scale with CAC=0.723.

#### 4. Data analysis

Analysis was conducted using SPSS version 20. Total scores were computed for each scale and normality of scores was assessed. The scores on some of the predictor variables were not normally distributed thus a logistic regression analysis was considered suitable. Logistic regression analysis is carried out to predict a discrete outcome (usually in binary form), for example health and wellbeing outcome for

pupils, from a set of variables that may be continuous, discrete, dichotomous, or a mixture of these (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). It has been highlighted that logistic regression does not require assumptions about the distributions of the predictor variables and the predictor variables do not have to be normally distributed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014). Associations between school participation, socio-ecological indicators, health and wellbeing outcome measures and demographic indices were assessed using chi-square and odds ratios from logistic regression binary models. Analysis included health and wellbeing outcome measures and socio-ecological dimensions of school life indicators as binary dependent variables and school participation scales as independent variables.

The median values of the dependent variable scale scores were used as cut-off values to dichotomise into ‘high’ (the median value score and above) and ‘low’ (below the median value score). All analyses were conducted separately by gender and school category (i.e., boys and girls or HPS and NHPS).

This quantitative (second phase) provided answers to research questions two to seven and the findings are shown in the second, third and fourth journal articles.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations/issues in this study**

The protection of participants in a research process has been highlighted as a main goal of the ethics review process for every research ethics committees (RECs) (Felzmann, Sixsmith, O’Higgins, Ni Chonnachtaigh & Nic Gabhainn, 2010). For example, there are international (e.g., DHHS, 2009) and national (e.g., DCYA, 2012) guidelines that guide research involving children; “*research with, and for, children is necessary because knowing about children and their lives and understanding the child’s perspective are key to protecting, promoting, and supporting their health and wellbeing*” (DCYA, 2012, p.1; DoHC, 2000). In line with these guidelines, appropriate steps were taken to ensure that this study was conducted to the highest ethical standards. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) stated that only the preliminary data collection phase can be systematically specified while applying for ethical permission. They suggested that the accompanying phase should be stated as provisional. Two applications for ethical approval were submitted to the National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway Research Ethics Committee for this study. First, an application for the qualitative phase of the study was submitted to the NUI

Galway Research Ethics Committee for approval. After approval was granted and the qualitative data had been collected, analysed and the findings used to develop the instruments for the quantitative phase, another application was made to the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee for carrying out the quantitative phase of the study.

After full ethical approval for both the qualitative and quantitative phase was granted by the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, consent to participate in the study was obtained from schools, pupils and parents before the research process was conducted.

### 3.9.1 Informed consent

It is imperative that consent should be obtained from research participants before any research is carried out or data collected (Shaw, Brady & Davey, 2011). Informed consent is usually sought from participants to minimise any risk or harm that might accrue to the research participant in the course of the research (e.g., Berg, 2007; Berg & Lune, 2014). According to Berg (2007), informed consent can be referred to as the acceptance of potential study participants to take part in a study. Berg and Lune (2014) stated that informed consent “*means the knowing consent of individuals to participate as an exercise of their choice, free from any element of fraud, deceit, duress, or similar unfair inducement or manipulation*” (p.90). The agreement to be a part of the research has to be by the free-will choice of the person. The individual must not at any point in time be coerced or deceived into participating in the study. Berg further stated that if consent is to be sought from children or people that may not have the ability to give consent on their own, due consent must be sought from parents, guardians or persons/organisation lawfully approved to stand in for such groups of people (Berg, 2007; Berg & Lune, 2014).

Researching with children usually requires first gaining consent from schools and/or parents and guardians (Shaw *et al.*, 2011); “*parental and/or guardian (informed) consent is required for a child (defined in Ireland as a person below the age of 18) to participate in research*” (DCYA, 2012, p.2). In addition, assent is indicated as “*a child's affirmative agreement to participate in research*” (DHHS, 2009, p.12). Furthermore, most institution-based research requires that researchers obtain consent

in written form. Researchers are expected to provide the study participant with details of the research, the risks associated with the research, if any, however minimal and also advantages of participating in the study (Berg, 2007; Berg & Lune, 2014). The study participant and the researcher should both sign and date the consent form before the commencement of the study. Thus, this process of obtaining consent shows the voluntary participation of individuals in research in which they are involved (Berg, 2007).

For the qualitative phase of this study, active consent was obtained from the schools and pupils, while passive consent was obtained from parents (for pupils). However, verbal consent was obtained from parent participants in the qualitative phase and voluntary participation was ensured throughout the process of the data collection.

In contrast, for the quantitative phase, active consent was sought from schools, parents and pupils before the questionnaires were distributed. The parents and pupils were informed that their participation in the research was voluntary and they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalties (e.g., DCYA, 2012); all parents and pupils who agreed to take part in the study were asked to sign a consent form; none of them withdrew at any stage of the research.

### *3.9.2 Risks and benefits*

A major concern in research ethics is the protection or minimising risks to research participants, including adults or children (DCYA, 2012; Felzmann *et al.*, 2010) and benefits that might accrue to participants' through participation in the research (Felzmann *et al.*, 2010). More specifically, ethical consideration related to researching with children is concerned with the level of risks children might be exposed to during the process of the research (DCYA, 2012). In this study, there were few potential risks to children, parents and schools for participation. For the qualitative study, the intention was to involve stakeholders (children and parents) directly in the research process. For example, the PRP as a method of data collection aims to involve research participants in the research process, and also to build their research capacity (Krishnaswamy, 2004). The questionnaires for the quantitative phase were pilot tested before distributing them to pupils and parents, and they contained no harmful information; questionnaires included questions about pupils'

school, school activities and events, relationships within the school environment and how pupils and parents take part in school. Study participants were supplied with invitation letters, participant information sheets and consent forms. Thank you letters were sent to schools after the process of data collection.

### *3.9.3 Confidentiality and data protection*

Confidentiality in any research is connected to the information that research participants has provided to the researcher and ensuring anonymity related to the data (Felzmann *et al.*, 2010). There are data protection requirements to guide information provided during the course of any research. According to Berg (2007) and Berg and Lune (2014), confidentiality can be referred to as a way of protecting the research participants' identity in the data collected (Berg, 2007). After the data have been collected, and during the data collection stage, researchers should ensure they remove anything that might link the participants' names or identity to the study. In relation to confidentiality, it has been suggested that numbers or, in some cases, false names could be used to identify study participants (Berg, 2007); this is to ensure confidentiality of the data collected and protection of the study participants. In this study, confidentiality of all data was ensured and assured to participants. Study participants were not required to identify themselves by names and numbers were used for identification of questionnaires; thus ensuring all data as anonymous. Data were kept in a safe place with access only by the researcher and all data in electronic format was encrypted (coded with numbers) and password protected.

## CHAPTER 4

### SUMMARY OF THE KEY FINDINGS FROM THE FOUR ARTICLES

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the key findings in each of the four journal articles included in this thesis. The findings are presented in four parts. Firstly, summary of qualitative findings from the first article ‘Taking Part in School Life: Views of Children’ is presented; this documents pupils’ conceptualisations of participation in school life from a three-phase participatory research process (PRP). This initial summary of the findings represents the qualitative part of the study. A summary of parents’ descriptions about participation in school life, which was also part of the qualitative study (this was not included as part of the first article) is also documented. Secondly, quantitative analysis of the relationship between school participation, school environments and health and wellbeing outcomes are presented; this represents results from the second article: ‘Children’s Participation in School: A Cross-sectional Study of the Relationship Between School Environments, Participation and Health and Wellbeing Outcomes’. Thirdly, the summary of findings from the third article, ‘Socio-ecological School Environments and Children’s Health and Wellbeing Outcomes’ are presented; this reports results from the logistic regression analysis employed to investigate associations between school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils. Finally, quantitative findings for article four on ‘Parental Participation in Primary Schools: the Views of Parents and Children’, which highlights similarities/differences between parents’ and pupils’ about parents’ current and/or possible future participation in school, are presented.

#### 4.2 Journal article 1: Taking part in school life: views of children

John-Akinola, Y. O., Gavin, A., O’Higgins, S. E. and Nic Gabhainn, S. (2013).

Taking part in school life: views of children. *Health Education*, 114 (1), 20-42 (for full text, please see Appendix 1)

**Obj. 1:** Develop definitions and description of participation relevant to Health

Promoting Schools (HPS) in Ireland from children and parents’ perspectives

**RQ 1:** What are the definitions of participation in school life from children and parents’ perspectives?

4.2.1 Demographic results

A total of 248 boys and girls aged 9-13 years participated, from nine classes (4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>) across three mixed-gender primary schools. Table 4.1 presents the mean age, class groups, number of participants and groups in each data collection phase across the three schools, the number of responses presented by pupils in phase 1, the number of categories developed by the sub-groups in phase 2 and the number of schema developed at phase 3.

Table 4.1: Features of research participants and responses from each school

	School I	School II	School III
<b>Age: mean 11.01 (SD 1.07)</b>	11.30	10.79	10.96
<b>Phases</b>			
<b>1</b>	6 <sup>th</sup> class, n = 44	6 <sup>th</sup> class, n=24	5 <sup>th</sup> class, n = 29
<b>2</b>	5 <sup>th</sup> class, n = 24	5 <sup>th</sup> class, n = 29	6 <sup>th</sup> class, n = 25
<b>3</b>	5 <sup>th</sup> class, n = 21	4 <sup>th</sup> class, n = 28	4 <sup>th</sup> /5 <sup>th</sup> class, n =24
<b>What makes you feel part of this school?</b>	98 responses 10 categories 1 schema	88 responses 17 categories 2 schema	91 responses 15 categories 2 schema
<b>If it was your job to make sure everyone felt part of your school, what would you do?</b>	85 responses 14 categories 2 schema	146 responses 27 categories 3 schema	123 responses 17 categories 2 schema

4.2.2 Phase 1 results

A total of 97 pupils across the three schools participated at this phase. Pupils were not divided into sub-groups; all pupils gave individual written answers to the two questions posed to them. Overall, 277 responses were generated for the first question “*What makes you feel a part of your school?*” and 354 answers were given to the second question “*If it was your job to make sure everybody in your school felt a part of the school, what would you do?*”. There were both common and varied responses

to the two questions across the three schools. For question one (Q1), overall, *'Having school uniform'*, *'having friends'*, *'playing sports'*, *'teachers'*, *'school'*, *'school work/education'* and *'school tours'* were the most common written answers given across the three schools. For question 2 (Q2), *'Treating everyone equally'*, *'inclusion of everyone in school activities (e.g., sports, school tours, and drama)'*, *'encouraging friendships'*, *'let everyone wear what they want'*, and *'no homework'* were examples of the more common written answers given across the three schools.

#### 4.2.3 Phase 2 results

For this phase, pupils were divided into sub-groups in each participating class. Two sub-groups from each of the three schools worked separately on the responses generated for the first question, and same number of sub-groups worked on the responses generated for the second question. Overall, 42 category titles emerged from the 277 responses for Q1 while 58 category titles emerged from the 354 responses for Q2. There were both similar and diverse categories developed across the three schools. For Q1, the most common category titles that emerged from the three schools were *'sports'*, *'friends'*, *'teachers'*, *'uniform'*, *'learning'*. The common category titles that emerged for Q2 were *'sports'*, *'welcome people'*, *'school tours'*, *'school activities'*, *'no homework'*.

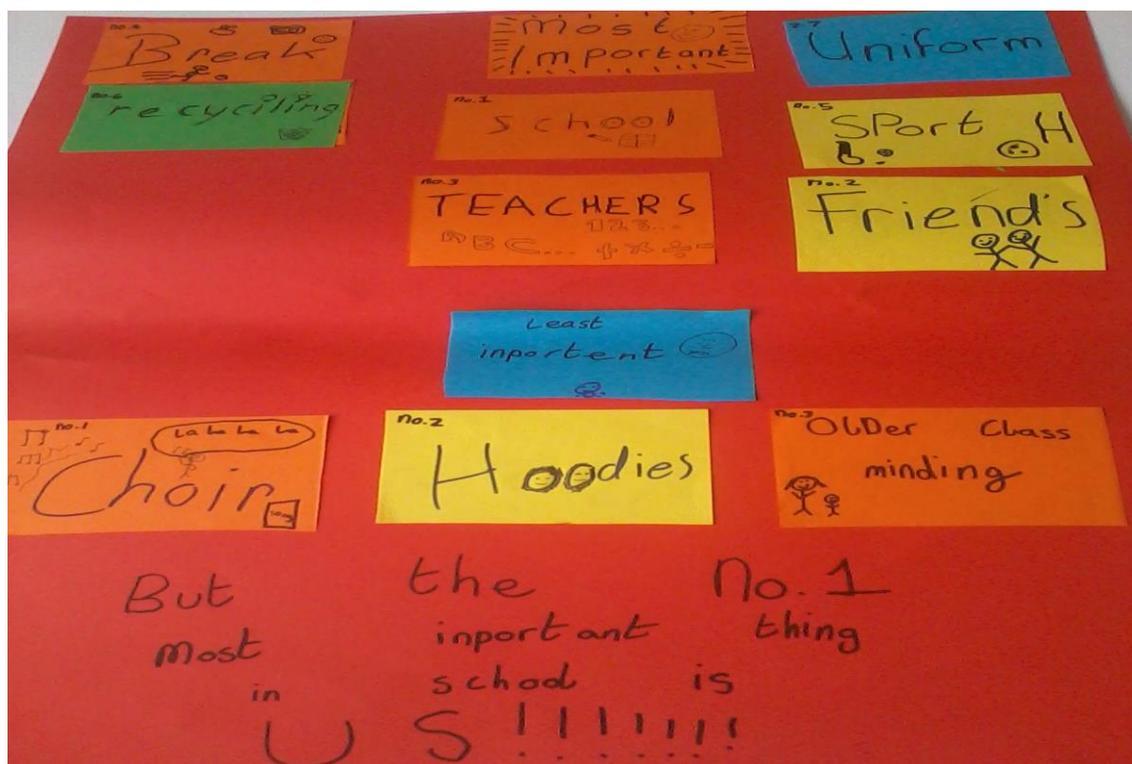
#### 4.2.4 Phase 3 results

A total of 12 sub-groups (Q1-5; Q2-7) across the three schools presented the data using schematic representations, based on the category titles developed during the second phase. The outline of the schematic presentations developed by each sub-group was different from each other. Some of the sub-groups organised their presentations in order of importance; some structured their presentations to show order of importance, while others were without any particular design.

For Q1, the results highlight differences and similarities across all five sub-groups in the three schools. Three main categories emerged of what make pupils feel a part of their school across the five sub-groups: friends, sports, and teachers. Other more common categories that emerged across at least two of the sub-groups include *'wearing uniform'*, *'school/going to school every day/every morning'*, *'classroom/learning'* and *'school tours'*. An example of the schema developed in

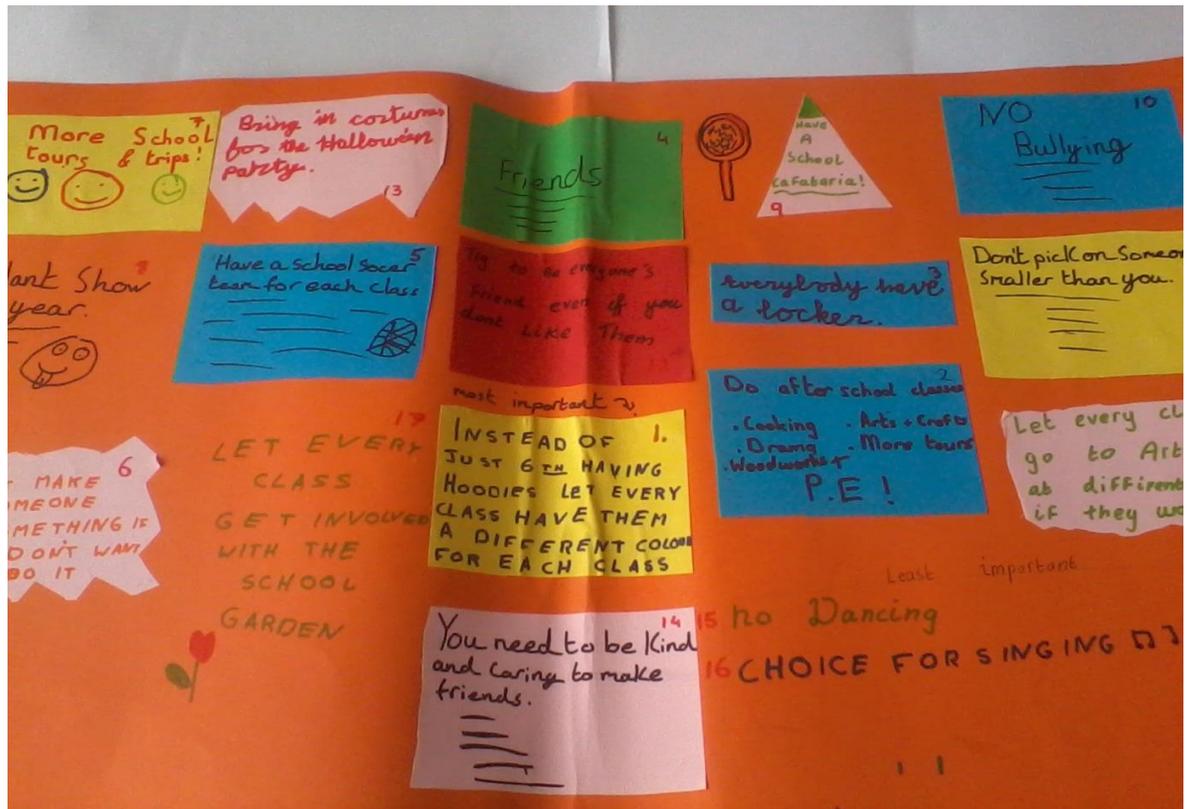
response to Q1 is presented in Figure 4.1. Schema from other groups and examples of category titles are shown in Appendix 5.

Figure 4.1: Schema of school II (Question 1)



For Q2, taking part in or doing school activities and events, 'encouraging friendship', 'ensuring everyone participates' and 'have equal privileges', 'having friends and being friendly' and inclusion of everyone equally were among the most frequent categories that emerged from the pupils' schema in all the seven sub-groups. An example of the schema developed in response to Q2 is presented in Figure 4.2. Other schematic presentations and category titles are shown in Appendix 5.

Figure 4.2: Schema of school II (Question 2)



The data from the qualitative phase highlighted activities and relationships (for example, with friends and teachers) that were associated within the context of everyday school life, and suggested that interpersonal relationships and having a sense of belonging are important indicators, from pupils' perspectives, for taking part and feeling part of school; this supported the principle of the Health Promoting School - promoting the health and wellbeing of pupils through a conducive school environment (e.g., Barnekow *et al.*, 2006). Pupils indicated the importance of the school social environment in determining effective pupil participation in school; they highlighted that ensuring the inclusion of everyone and having a sense of belonging within the school setting could potentially encourage increased pupil participation in school. Pupils emphasised the importance of friends and how being involved in school activities was linked to having fun, getting to play and get along with friends.

### 4.3 Taking part in school life: views of parents

Parents were also asked analogous questions on their perspectives on participation in school. Most common categories that emerged from parents' views on participating in school included getting involved in school activities, encouraged to talk about issues that concern child and how they feel, and feeling a part of the school. Developing good connections between schools and parents can contribute to promoting school activities and improve home-school relationships (Senior, 2012; St. Leger *et al.*, 2010). Details of the data from parents are presented in Appendix 6. The conceptualisations of parents' participation in school from parents' perspectives were included in the survey instrument to measure both current and future parental participation in schools.

### 4.4 Journal article 2: Children's participation in school: a cross-sectional study of the relationship between school environments, participation and health and wellbeing outcomes

John-Akinola, Y. O. and Nic Gabhainn, S. (2014). Children's participation in school: a cross-sectional study of the relationship between school environments, participation and health and wellbeing outcomes. *BMC Public Health*, 14 (964) (for full text, please see Appendix 1)

**Obj. 2:** Measure the perceptions of children on participation in school life.

**RQ 2:** What are the perceptions of pupils on participation in school life?

**Obj. 3:** Measure the extent to which children's participation in school life is associated with health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils

**RQ 3:** Are there associations between participation of pupils in school life and health and wellbeing outcome for pupils?

**Obj. 4:** Determine the relationship between children's participation in school life and the socio-ecological environment of the school

**RQ 4:** Are there associations between pupils' participation of in school life and the socio-ecological environment of schools?

#### 4.4.1 Demographic characteristics of pupils

The mean age was 10.82 years (SD 0.88). There were more (boys 54.7%; n=122) than (girls 45.3%; n=101) and more pupils in NHPS (64.1%; n=143) than in designated HPS (35.9%; n=80). Eighty pupils (35.9%) were in the 4<sup>th</sup> class, 96 (43%) in the 5<sup>th</sup> class and 47 (21.1%) in the 6<sup>th</sup> class (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Demographic characteristic of pupils

Demographic variable/ Characteristics of pupils	ALL(n=223) (100%)	HPS (n=80) (35.9%)	NHPS (n=143) (64.1%)
Number (n)	n %	n %	n %
Age/Age of child			
9	12 (5.4)	4 (5.0)	8 (5.6)
10	71 (31.8)	27 (33.8)	44 (30.8)
11	90 (40.4)	32 (40.0)	58 (40.6)
12	46 (20.6)	15 (18.8)	31 (21.7)
13	4 (1.8)	2 (2.5)	2 (1.4)
Gender			
Male	122 (54.7)	41(51.3)	81 (56.6)
Female	101 (45.3)	39 (48.8)	62 (43.4)
Class type			
4 <sup>th</sup>	80 (35.9)	36 (45.0)	44 (30.8)
5 <sup>th</sup>	96 (43.0)	31 (38.8)	65 (45.5)
6 <sup>th</sup>	47 (21.1)	13 (16.3)	34 (23.8)

**Notes:** Health Promoting School (HPS); Non-Health Promoting School (NHPS); N=223 (Pupils remaining after 8 outliers were removed)

#### 4.4.2 Extent of pupil participation in school

Overall, the mean score for participation in making school decisions and rules was 15.81 (SD 3.57); the mean score for participation in school activities was 22.25 (SD 3.42); the mean score for participation in school events was 17.08 (SD 3.61); and the mean score for reported positive perception of school participation was 26.20 (SD 3.36). The differences in the reported mean score for participation in school decisions and rules, school activities and school events scales among pupils in HPS

and NHPS were marginal and not statistically significant. However, the mean score for reported positive perception of school participation was significantly lower ( $\chi^2=5.13$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) among pupils in HPS (mean=26.03; SD 3.37) compared to NHPS (mean=26.30; SD 3.36) (Table 4.3).

#### 4.4.3 School participation and health and wellbeing of pupils

Overall, the mean score for the health and wellbeing outcome measure was 15.26 (SD 2.44). The difference in the mean scores for HPS (15.00, SD 2.61) and NHPS (15.40, SD 2.33) was not statistically significant. The univariate logistic regression analyses revealed that school participation indicators (participating in making school decisions and rules (OR 1.22, 95% CI 1.12-1.33); participating in school activities (OR 1.20, 95% CI 1.10-1.31); participating in school events (OR 1.19, 95% CI 1.10-1.29) and reported positive perception of school participation (OR 1.26, 95% CI 1.15-1.39) were all positively associated with reported positive health and wellbeing outcomes for all pupils, and for each sub-group (please see article 2 in Appendix 1 [Table 3] for results).

Multivariate analyses showed that the full model containing all predictors was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(4, N=215) = 39.98$ ,  $P<0.001$ ; these results indicate that the model was able to distinguish between pupils who reported and did not report positive health and wellbeing outcomes. Analysis shows that only reported positive perception of school participation (OR 1.20, 95% CI 1.06-1.35) was positively associated with health and wellbeing outcomes for all pupils; none of the other school participation predictors were significantly associated with reported health and wellbeing outcomes group (please see article 2 in Appendix 1 [Table 3] for results).

Table 4.3 Mean school participation scores, overall and by gender and school category

	<b>Participation in school (Mean scores and Standard Deviations)</b>			
	Participation in school decisions and rules <b>Range 6-30</b> Mean (SD)	Participation in school activities <b>Range 10-30</b> Mean (SD)	Participation in school events <b>Range 6-30</b> Mean (SD)	Positive perception of school participation <b>Range 10-35</b> Mean (SD)
All (n=223)	15.81 (3.57)	22.25(3.42)	17.08 (3.61)	26.20 (3.36)
All HPS <sup>1</sup> (n=80)	15.89 (3.99)	22.18(3.22)	16.78( 3.60)	26.03 (3.37)
All NHPS <sup>2</sup> (n=143)	15.77 (3.32)	22.29(3.54)	17.25 (3.62)	26.30 (3.36)
	$\chi^2=0.09$ , df=1, p>0.05	$\chi^2=0.06$ , df=1, p>0.05	$\chi^2=0.00$ , df=1, p>0.05	$\chi^2=5.13$ , df=1, p<0.05
All Boys (n=122)	16.19 (3.30)	21.82 (3.25)	16.69(3.22)	25.77 (3.67)
HPS Boys (n=41)	17.65 (2.98)	23.17 (2.92)	17.78(3.55)	26.68 (3.64)
NHPS Boys (n=81)	15.46 (3.23)	21.14 (3.21)	16.14(2.91)	25.31 (3.62)
Chi Square	$\chi^2=7.06$ , df=1, p<0.01	$\chi^2=1.42$ , df=1, p=0.23	$\chi^2= 3.54$ , df=1, p= 0.06	$\chi^2=0.40$ , df=1, p=0.53
All Girls (n=101)	15.35 (3.83)	22.76 (3.57)	17.55(4.0)	26.72 (2.88)
HPS Girls (n=39)	14.08 (4.13)	21.13 (3.23)	15.72(3.38)	25.36 (2.96)
NHPS Girls (n=62)	16.18 (3.42)	23.79 (3.40)	18.71(3.95)	27.59 (2.48)
Chi Square	$\chi^2=5.60$ , df=1, p<0.05	$\chi^2=2.35$ , df=1, p=0.13	$\chi^2= 4.03$ , df=1, p<0.05	$\chi^2=18.83$ , df=1, p<0.001

#### 4.4.4 School participation and socio-ecological indicators

The simple logistic regression analyses revealed that there were positive associations between each school participation scale and socio-ecological relationships at school. Participating in making school decisions and rules (OR 1.58, 95% CI 1.29-1.93) was positively associated with reported positive perception of school in HPS. Conversely, participating in school activities (OR 1.63, 95% CI 1.39-1.92) and

school events (OR 1.48, 95% CI 1.29-1.70) were more likely to be significantly associated with perceptions of school policies in NHPS while reported positive perception of school participation was more likely to be significantly associated with class relationships (OR 1.71, 95% CI 1.41-2.07) and relationship with teacher (OR 1.61, 95% CI 1.35-1.93) in NHPS group (please see article 2 in Appendix 1 [Table 4] for results).

The findings from this article represent a broader dimension of children's participation in school life (participation in school decisions and rules, participation in school activities, participation in school events and positive perception of school participation) than any previous work and overall, pupils had a relatively positive perception of school participation. It might be expected that the HPS that were reported to be actively engaged with the HPS principles would report higher mean scores for school participation thus signifying higher levels of pupil participation than NHPS. However, the findings in this second journal article showed that there were only marginal differences between reported mean scores for HPS and NHPS schools. This suggests that being a HPS in this context implies a school that is working on the application of the core concepts and principles of HPS and therefore still striving to become 'Health Promoting'. On the other hand, schools categorised as NHPS might also be engaged in similar activities as HPS based on good educational practices encouraged generally among Irish schools.

Overall, pupil participation in school life was positively associated with health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils. This current study identified positive associations from a more general perspective on participation of children in everyday school life. In addition, there were positive associations between participation of children in school life and socio-ecological school environment; but the link between school participation and the socio-ecological environment of the school in this study illustrates a more general perspective on pupil participation in school life. It has been suggested that the close connection or association of children with their environment, for example schools, has the potential to act as a strong determinant in enhancing children's participation in the school setting (Simovska, 2004). In addition, the school environment is considered a vital component of the HPS approach (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006; Griebler *et al.*, 2014).

### 4.5 Journal article 3: Socio-ecological school environments and children's health and wellbeing outcomes

John-Akinola, Y. O. and Nic Gabhainn, S. (2014). Socio-ecological school environments and children's health and wellbeing outcomes. *Health Education* (in press) (for full text, please see Appendix 1)

**Obj. 5:** Determine the relationship between the socio-ecological school environment and children's health and wellbeing

**RQ 5:** Are there associations between the school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcome for pupils?

#### 4.5.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of pupils

The mean age of participating pupils was 10.82 years (SD 0.88). Table 4.4 reports the school type and distribution of pupils in HPS and NHPS. There were more all boys (49.3%; n=110) and all girls (40.8%; n=91) than mixed gender (9.9%; n=22) schools; 62.3% of pupils were in DEIS schools while 37.7% were in non-DEIS schools ('DEIS' schools are schools included in the 'Delivering Equality Opportunity in Schools', which is an action plan for educational inclusion to address educational disadvantage and prioritise the educational needs of children in disadvantaged communities). There were more pupils in urban schools (78.9%; n=176) than in rural schools (21.1%; n=47) (Table 4.4).

#### 4.5.2 Perceptions of school socio-ecological environment

A considerable proportion of the pupils reported positive perceptions of school socio-ecological environment, with some gender and school type variations (see Table 4.5). Overall, the mean score for school perception was 26.80 (SD 4.23) with scores ranging from 8-40; the mean score for perception of school policy was 18.51 (SD 3.05) with scores ranging from 6-30; the mean score for perception of class relationships was 34.40 (SD 4.56) with scores ranging from 8-40, the mean score for perception of teacher relationship was 20.32 (SD 4.32) with scores ranging from 8-40 and the mean score for perception of parental participation in school life was 8.86 (SD 2.08) with scores ranging from 2-12.

Perception of school policy ( $p<0.01$ ) and school perception ( $p<0.05$ ) was significantly higher among girls than boys. The mean scores were significantly higher among pupils in non-DEIS schools for all school socio-ecological dimensions apart from parental participation in school life (Table 4.5). In addition, the mean score was significantly higher for only perception of school policy ( $p<0.01$ ) in mixed gender schools (mean=19.32; SD 2.40) compared to all boys (mean=17.88; SD 3.03) and all girls (mean=19.08; SD 3.08) schools.

#### 4.5.3 Pupils' self-reported health and wellbeing outcomes

Overall, the mean score for health and wellbeing outcome measures was 15.26 (SD 2.44), with scores ranging from 8-20. Reported health and wellbeing was significantly ( $p<0.05$ ) higher among pupils in non-DEIS schools (mean=15.71; SD 2.24) compared to DEIS schools (mean=14.98; SD 2.51) (Table 4.5).

Table 4.4 Socio-demographic characteristic of pupils

<b>Socio demographic characteristics of pupils</b>	<b>ALL (n=223)</b>	<b>HPS (n=80)</b>	<b>NHPS(n=143)</b>
Number (n)	n %	n %	n %
School location			
Rural	47 (21.1)	7 (8.8)	40 (28.0)
Urban	176 (78.9)	73 (91.3)	103 (72.0)
School type			
DEIS	139 (62.3)	36 (45.0)	103 (72.0)
Non-DEIS	84 (37.7)	44 (55.0)	40 (28.0)
School type			
All boys	110 (49.3)	37 (46.3)	73 (51.0)
All girls	91 (40.8)	36 (45.0)	55 (38.5)
Mixed gender	22 (9.9)	7 (8.8)	15 (10.5)

**Notes:** Health Promoting School (HPS); Non-Health Promoting School (NHPS); Schools included in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS); Schools NOT included in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (non-DEIS)

Table 4.5 Mean scores (SD) for dimensions of school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes, overall and by pupil gender and school type

	All (n=223)	Boys (n=122)	Girls (n=101)	DEIS (n=139)	Non-DEIS (n=84)
<b>Perceptions of school socio-ecological environment</b>	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
School perception Range 8-40	26.80 (4.23)	20.14 (4.10)	27.50 (3.97)*	25.83 (4.52)	28.42 (3.10)***
School policy Range 6-30	18.51(3.05)	17.98 (2.98)	19.15 (3.02)**	18.20 (3.20)	19.02 (2.72)*
Class relationships Range 8-40	34.40 (4.56)	34.42 (4.31)	34.38 (4.86)	33.71 (4.80)	35.55 (3.89)**
Teacher relationship Range 8-40	20.32 (4.32)	26.80 (4.23)	20.53 (4.58)	19.50 (4.69)	21.68 (3.21)**
Parental participation in school life Range 2-12	8.86 (2.08)	8.67 (2.01)	9.10 (2.16)	8.79 (2.14)	8.99 (1.99)
<b>Perceptions of health and wellbeing</b>					
Health and wellbeing Range 8-20	15.26 (2.44)	15.27 (2.37)	15.24 (2.52)	14.98 (2.51)	15.71 (2.24)*

#### 4.5.4 Associations between school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes

The logistic regression analyses revealed that there were consistent significant associations between each dimension of school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing, and that this held for both genders and across all school types with the exception of rural schools and two school socio-ecological dimensions in non-DEIS schools (please see article 3 in Appendix 1 [Table 2] for results).

Parental participation in school life (OR 1.49, 95% CI 1.14-1.95) and school perception (OR 1.36, 95% CI 1.15-1.61) were more positively associated with reported health and wellbeing in HPS (please see article 3 in Appendix 1 [Table 2] for results). On the other hand, perception of school policy (OR 1.27, 95% CI 1.12-1.43) and teacher relationship (OR 1.20, 95% CI 1.10-1.32) were more likely to be significantly associated with health and wellbeing in NHPS (please see article 3 in Appendix 1 [Table 2] for results)

The journal article three findings indicate that overall, there were positive associations between the school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils. Various research have linked the school environment with the health behaviour of pupils but findings in this article highlight positive associations between the socio-ecological environments of the school, emphasising features related to the intrapersonal, interpersonal, organisational, policy and the community characteristics of the school, and pupils general health and wellbeing outcomes, including pupils' self-rated health, perceptions of happiness, self-esteem and life satisfaction. These finding thus emphasise the relevance of the socio-ecological environments of the school to school health promotion and presents a broader view across different school categories (HPS/NHPS; All boys/All girls/Mixed gender; Rural/Urban; DEIS/Non-DEIS) although the positive associations did not hold for pupils in rural schools.

#### **4.6 Journal article 4: Parental participation in primary schools: the views of parents and children**

John-Akinola, Y. O. and Nic Gabhainn, S. (2014). Parental participation in primary schools; the views of parents and children. *Health Education*, 114 (5), 378-397 (for full text, please see Appendix 1).

**Obj. 6:** Investigate the views of parents and children on the participation of parents in school life

**RQ 6:** What are the views of parents and children about parents' current and possible future participation in school life?

**RQ 7:** To what extent do parents and children agree on the issue of parents' current and possible future participation in school life?

##### 4.6.1 Demographic results

A total of 231 pupils and 218 parents across nine schools participated, reflecting a response rate of 57.2% for parents and 75.6% for pupils. There were more mothers (72.2%) than fathers (27.8%), but more boys (53.7%) than girls (46.3%) that participated (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 Demographic characteristics of respondents

	Parents (n=218)	Pupils (n=231)
Demographic variable	n %	n %
Age/Age of pupil		
9	6 (2.8)	12 (5.2)
10	62 (29.1)	74 (32)
11	88 (41.3)	92 (39.8)
12	53 (24.9)	49 (21.2)
13	4 (1.9)	4 (1.7)
	*N=213	
Gender		
Male	59 (27.8)	124 (53.7)
Female	153(72.2)	107 (46.3)
School type		
Health Promoting School (HPS)	80 (36.7)	86 (37.2)
Non-Health Promoting School (NHPS)	138 (63.3)	145 (62.8)

**Note:** \*5 Parents did not state their child's age

#### 4.6.2 Extent of parents' participation in school life

##### *Parents*

Less than half of parents (40.6%; 37.9% mothers and 44.8% fathers) reported that they were 'always or often' involved in school activities. The majority of parents (73.5%) reported that they were 'always or often' made to feel a part of school while the majority of parents (79.5%) reported that they were 'always or often' encouraged to talk about things that concern their child in school (Table 4.7).

##### *Pupils*

Similarly, less than half (43.2%) of pupils reported that their parents were 'always or often' involved in school activities. Many (65.6%) pupils reported that their parents were 'always or often' made to feel a part of school while the majority of pupils (83.6%) reported that their parents were 'always or often' encouraged to talk about things that concern them in school (Table 4.7).

Overall, observed differences were not statistically significant between HPS and NHPS for parents and pupils.

Table 4.7 Parents and pupils views of parents’ involvement in school, overall and by gender and HPS status

	Parents					Pupils				
	All parents %	Fathers (%)	Mothers (%)	HPS (%)	NHPS (%)	All pupils (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	HPS (%)	NHPS (%)
Involved in school activities										
Always/Often	40.6	44.8	37.9	41.8	39.9	43.2	39.8	47.1	41.0	44.4
Sometimes	45.2	43.1	47.7	44.3	45.7	38.3	40.7	35.6	41.0	36.8
Never	14.3	12.1	14.0	13.9	14.5	18.5	19.5	17.3	18.1	18.8
Feel part of school										
Always/Often	73.5	70.7	75.5	72.2	74.3	65.6	66.7	64.4	56.6	70.8
Sometimes	21.9	22.4	21.2	24.1	20.6	26.9	27.6	26.0	34.9	22.2
Never	4.7	6.9	3.3	3.8	5.1	7.5	5.7	9.6	8.4	6.9
Encouraged to talk about things that concern child in school										
Always/Often	79.5	74.1	82.1	79.5	79.6	83.6	78.9	89.3	86.6	81.9
Sometimes	14.4	19.0	13.2	11.5	16.1	12.8	16.3	8.7	9.8	14.6
Never	6.0	6.9	4.6	9.0	4.4	3.5	4.9	1.9	3.7	3.5

### 4.6.3 Suggested direct actions for parents' participation in school

#### *Parents*

Overall, 70 parents (54.7%) suggested direct actions on how they would like to take part in school life. The most common action proposed by 51.4% of the 70 parents was that parents would like to take part in school by being actively involved in 'doing' school activities, which included 'helping' with school activities or 'viewing/watching' school activities, for example, sports/games (20%), school tours (10%) and fundraising for the school (4%). Nine parents (12.9%) indicated their interest in contributing to learning in the classroom, five parents (7.1%) indicated that they would like to be part of the parents' association and attend meetings, four parents (5.7%) reported that they would like to be involved in the school by taking part in decision-making processes while seven parents (10%) stated that they would like to get involved in school activities but did not describe any particular one (see Table 4.8).

#### *Pupils*

In total, 89 (55.6%) pupils proposed direct ways that parents could take part in school life. Similar to parents, the most common suggestion was through participation in school activities, for example, doing school activities (39.3%), school tours (14.6%), take part in sports and games (11.2%), take part in activities like arts, baking or music (13%), organise or set up school activities or events (10.1%) while 11.2% suggested that parents could take part in school by coming to watch school activities and events or sports and matches (see Table 4.8).

Eleven pupils (12.4%) said that parents could take part in school by helping with school or class work, seven pupils (7.9%) indicated that they would like their parents to be part of parents' association, be on school committees or have a say in school and four pupils (4.5%) suggested that parents could help them with homework.

Overall, there were similar opinions from both parents and pupils on direct actions for parents' participation in school. A few divergent suggestions indicated that parents would like to take part in decision-making in school while pupils were more inclined to suggest that parents could build relationships with teachers, help to organise school activities, and come and watch school activities or events matches (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8 Sub-categories developed from active actions for parents, views of pupils and parents

Sub-category	Shared	Pupils n (%)	Parents n (%)
Parents take part by doing or joining activities	✓	35 (39.3)	36 (51.4)
Parents help with class work or learning in class	✓	11 (12.4)	9 (12.9)
Parents attend and watch activities, events or games		10 (11.2)	-
Take part in school activities – non-specific		-	7 (10)
Parents help with organising school activities		9 (10.1)	-
Parents take part in decision-making in school		-	4 (5.7)
Parents be part of school committees	✓	7 (7.9)	5 (7.1)
Parents take part in school – general	✓	4 (4.5)	5 (7.1)
Parents help children (e.g., with homework)	✓	4 (4.5)	3 (4.3)
Building relationships between parents and teachers*		4 (4.5)	-
Other	✓	3 (3.4)	6 (8.6)
Parents give support to children	✓	2 (2.2)	4 (5.7)
<i>Total</i>		<i>n=89</i>	<i>n=70</i>

**Notes:** ‘Shared’ means similar views between parents and pupils;

\*Parents to take the initiative

Findings from this article highlight that there were broad similarities between the views of both parents and pupils on parents’ current and possible future participation in school life, although with some divergent views. The majority of parents and pupils were inclined to be positive about parents’ participation in school life, as previously documented by Vyverman and Vettenburg (2009). Both parents and pupils proposed more ideas on how parents could become actively engaged with the school, than suggestions on how schools could engage parents; this potentially places emphasis on parents to take the initiative to take part in school life. Furthermore, the similarities of views of both parents and children on parents’

participation in school life suggest that it might be useful to consult with children when considering how to improve or encourage parents' participation in school life.

Supplementary data for the four articles are shown in the Appendix. In addition, other results that were not included in the four journal articles are also shown in Appendices 5-7.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the key findings from the study and the strengths of the overall study. It discusses how the four articles connect together; links findings from the articles back to the literature and present the implications of the finding for future research, policy, theory and practice.

The chapter is structured as follows:

5.2 The key findings across the four journal articles

5.3 How the four articles connect together and link back to the study aim

5.4 Summary of key contributions: children and parents' participation in school

5.5 Methodological limitations of the findings

5.6 Strengths of the overall study

5.7 Implications of the findings for theory

5.8 General implications and recommendations for future research, policy and practice

5.9 Conclusions

#### 5.2 Key findings across the four journal articles

- Data from this study have revealed the importance of belonging within the school setting and provides encouragement for increasing pupil participation. Relevant findings are described in Chapter 4 of this thesis and discussed in the first journal article.

- Measures of pupil participation in school life were all positively associated with health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils. These findings are described in Chapter 4 of this thesis and in the second journal article.
- Logistic regression analyses indicated positive associations between school participation and school socio-ecological environment. Findings are outlined in Chapter 4 of this thesis and are presented in the second journal article.
- School socio-ecological environment was significantly associated with health and wellbeing outcomes for all groups of pupils. There were very few differences between different school types. Findings are outlined in Chapter 4 of this thesis and in the third journal article.
- There was general agreement between parents and pupils on parents' current and possible future participation in school life. Findings are described in Chapter 4 of this thesis and in the fourth journal article.

### **5.3 How the four articles connect together and link back to the study aim**

This section discusses how the four articles connect with one another and link back to the aim of this study, which was to explore the participation of children and their parents in school life and to investigate the relevance of pupil participation for school environment and health and wellbeing of pupils. This study examined an important component, children and parents' participation in school life, within the global initiative of HPS, and the broader area of school Health Promotion and Education. The findings from this study addressed an area that has not been comprehensively researched and where more information provided could be useful for research, practice and policy, particularly, in the Irish context.

This mixed methods sequential study authenticated the importance of children's participation in the school setting and within the Health Promoting School (HPS) context. Students' participation represents one of the key pillars in HPS. It has been implied that the participation of pupils' in schools should be encouraged to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of health promotion approaches through ownership, and that a participatory approach ought to influence all aspects of a democratic HPS environment (Barnekow, 2006). The creation of a conducive atmosphere in school is hypothesised to encourage children's participation and can

help children gain confidence and become empowered to participate in the school and community (Simovska & Jensen, 2009). Participation of children in school can help to improve cooperation and team-work among pupils, facilitating good relationships between the student body, the school staff and school community as a whole (Simovska, 2000).

The quantitative survey findings on children's participation in school life identified that, overall, pupils had a relatively positive perception of participating in school life. A notable finding from this study was that it empirically links school participation with health and wellbeing; this had been previously documented by de Roiste *et al.* (2012). However, this study was different in that it reported school participation among younger children (in primary schools) and includes a much broader definition of school participation; it also highlights differences and/or similarities in HPS and NHPS schools. The findings demonstrated positive associations between school participation and school socio-ecological environment, and illustrated that the socio-ecological school environment is related to general health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils; this is in contrast to the extant literature, which has primarily documented associations between various characteristics of the school environment and the health behaviour of pupils.

Furthermore, parents' participation in school life is one of the key principles of the HPS. The emphasis on the school existing within a wider community and the relationships between the school and the community, especially with parents, is considered an important dimension of the HPS movement. Similar to the procedures used with pupils, the descriptions of parents' participation in school from parents' perspectives were used to develop the parents' questions in the survey instrument; this was used to measure both current and possible future parental participation in school life. The quantitative findings on parents' participation in school indicated that the majority of parents and pupils stated that parents were made to feel a part of school and were encouraged to talk about things that concern the child in school. Less than 50% of both parents and pupils however specified that parents were always or often involved in school activities. Overall, the findings highlight that both parents and pupils were inclined to be positive about parents' participation in school life. More similar, than diverse, views were documented by parents and pupils on

possible future participation of parents in school life. These results indicated the importance of parents' involvement in their child's school life, as corroborated in the literature and implied that parents are willing and ready to participate in their child's school life. Moreover, these findings illustrated parents' perspectives on school participation and the similarity of views on parents' participation from parents and pupils; a perspective that is novel in the literature on parents' participation in school.

#### **5.4 Summary of key contributions: children and parents' participation in school**

The data from this study imply that it is vital to involve stakeholders in developing conceptualisations of school participation. The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion states that '*Health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life; where they learn, work, play and love.*' (WHO, 1986, p.3). The Ottawa Charter established a course for the settings approach to health promotion and emphasised improving the health of the whole school environment as opposed to individual health alone. The HPS values and objectives, as reinforced recently in the Odense Statement (CBO, 2013), highlight the importance of the school environment for empowering children and young people to improve and increase control over their health and wellbeing. The HPS model emphasises pupil participation as one of its key principles, and it has been argued that genuine participation of pupils may be essential for the success of a Health Promoting School programme, which impacts both on the pupil and the school environment as a whole (Simovska, 2000; Simovska, 2004). The relationship between the school and the wider community is also an important component of the HPS model; positive relationships between the school and the community, especially with the parents of pupils, is encouraged (Senior, 2012).

The findings from this study illustrated positive associations between pupil participation, school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils. It however did not show any systematic differences between HPS and NHPS which suggests that there is a need for better clarity between factors that distinguish HPS from NHPS among Irish schools.

The findings further illustrated parents' willingness to participate in school life and showed that pupils reported similar views. Parents' participation in school, in collaboration with the school community, can contribute to creating and supporting an environment that is conducive to improved health and wellbeing of the whole school environment (e.g., Barnekow *et al.*, 2006). In addition, the similarity of views of parents and pupils concerning parents' participation in school life suggest that children could potentially represent the views of their parents regarding how to improve parental participation in school.

### **5.5 Methodological limitations of the findings**

The data from this study were collected from Irish primary school pupils in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes; therefore, although the findings highlight consistent findings across school types, results may not be generalisable to other populations. A more heterogeneous group and a larger study sample would be required for greater representativeness.

This study employed a cross-sectional design and showed associations between pupils' participation in school life, school socio-ecological environment and general health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils. Thus, causal relationships cannot be inferred, neither can the direction of any documented relationships.

The reference to the measures related to the school environment in this study did not include the school physical environment. The conceptual definitions of participation in school life, from children and parents perspectives, from the first phase of this study, did not include the school physical environment as one of the most common categories. The most common categories of participation in school life from children and parents perspectives thus informed the measures of participation in this study. It may be desirable that future studies include the effect of the school physical environment on school participation and health and wellbeing outcome for pupils.

In the context of this study the views of children were considered as the primary basis for developing questionnaire variables. The addition of some variables from Lansdown's framework for monitoring and evaluating children's participation (Lansdown, 2011) to develop the children's questionnaire may be perceived to have

diluted the original conceptualisations developed from children's perspectives. However, more generally in health promotion contexts, the views of children as stakeholders are not the only views necessarily represented on issues or matters that relates to children. The views of children as well as other stakeholders are considered important in developing programmes or interventions for children. Therefore variables that were related to children's views were also included from Lansdown's framework.

The lack of systematic differences between HPS and NHPS could be due to the methods of the study or the categorisation of the schools; but it is clear that further qualitative research is needed to identify essential characteristics that define a HPS in the Irish context. In addition, there are likely to be a range of other, unmeasured, factors that influence all the concepts included in the study, and particularly the health and wellbeing outcomes. Further qualitative research could be employed to gain more understanding of the processes underlying the associations between pupils' participation in school life, school socio-ecological environment and general health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils.

The responses from the parents' participation in school survey questions were limited to short answers to open-ended survey (quantitative) questions; a more detailed or in-depth qualitative approach may have yielded greater understanding of the practical steps parents or schools could take to increase parents' active participation in school life. However, that would incur a substantially increased respondent burden and it would have proved very challenging to engage so many parents and pupils across a broad range of primary education settings.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for 'parents' participation in school life' (CAC=0.584) was quite low compared to other scales. The ideal value for the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of a scale is estimated to be above 0.7 (e.g., DeVellis, 2003; Pallant, 2010; Field, 2009). However, a number of other factors are assumed to affect the value of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cortina (1993) indicated that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is contingent on the number of items on a scale; this might account for the rather low Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the 'parents' participation in school life' scale. Pallant (2010) noted that in the case of low Cronbach's alpha coefficient values, the value of the mean inter-item correlation

might be more appropriate to consider. Briggs and Cheek (1986) stated that a mean inter-item correlation ranging from 0.2 to 0.4 would be considered acceptable, while mean inter-item correlation values lower than 0.1 are considered unacceptable. The mean inter-item correlation for the ‘parents’ participation in school life’ scale was 0.32; thus the reliability of the scale was considered acceptable for analysis in this study.

The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient values for ‘participation in making school rules’ (0.646); ‘participation in school activities’ (0.604); ‘participation in school events’ (0.623); and ‘perception of school policy’ (0.605) were below 0.7. However, mean inter-item correlation for all these scales were within the appropriate range of 0.2 to 0.4.

### **5.6 Strengths of the overall study**

This section discusses the strengths of the study and the key contributions to the body of knowledge on children and parents’ participation in school life.

#### **a. Documenting the voice of children**

Documenting the voice of children on what participation means to them might be a powerful tool in improving the planning of child participation programmes. This study aimed to explore the views of children on school participation and how it could be improved. The research process employed in this study was one that illustrated that pupils were given the freedom to express their views of what feeling part of the school meant to them. It is hypothesised that children feel happy and involved when their opinions are counted as worthy and expressed in an interactive and liberal environment (Simovska & Jensen, 2009).

Furthermore, involving children in developing the conceptualisations of participation in school from their perspectives, which were used to develop the main variables and the measures of participation in the survey instrument, support and corroborate the obligation and ethical importance of involving children as active participants, both directly and actively, in the research process and not simply including them as research respondents; it also supports Article 12 of the UN convention on the children’s rights which states that ‘*children have the right to express their views*

*freely in all matters affecting them, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'* (UN, 1989, p. 4).

This implies that encouraging children to be active collaborators in their different communities, especially in schools, contributes both to their educational and personal learning and so empowers them to be successful contributors to their society. In this regard, it has been hypothesised that the practice of genuine participation is essential for the success of a Health Promoting School programme, which impacts both on the student and the school environment as a whole (Simovska, 2000; Simovska, 2004).

#### b. Children's participation in research

This study is important in that it has further emphasised the potential of children to take part in research and highlights that it is both beneficial to children and to children's research community in general to engage children in research to understand their own perspectives on issues that concern them; this study showed the value of including children as active participants in research. The study illustrated that children have the capacity to take part in research that is related to them, which could ensure genuine participation of children in school and increase the potential to enhance their wellbeing. Children as young as 9-13 years have a clear understanding of what participation in their school means to them; they can work with relatively large data set and they possess the capacity to categorise and analyse conceptual data on participation in school with minimal adult supervision.

The qualitative research process (PRP) used in this study encouraged group processes and showed that young pupils can work together in a team to generate, categorise and analyse data with limited interference and have fun at the same time; this was also observed by the researchers. Children's contributions to research should be given due recognition and exploring children's views on participation can help to ensure genuine participation of pupils in school. Health Promotion in schools should have the goal of encouraging students to have freedom of expression in all aspects of the educational methods and approaches used in teaching, thus, encouraging in them a sense of belonging. Genuine student participation provides the opportunity for students to have a sense of ownership in the method of learning

(Simovska, 2007). This is intended to give them a choice in improving themselves and their environment.

c. The PRP as a developmental tool to facilitate children's participation in schools

In this study, the participatory research process (PRP) was found to be an effective method used in engaging and identifying the perspectives of pupils' on participation in school life. Pupils were given the opportunity to be involved in all phases of the PRP with minimal influence from the researchers or class teachers; this encouraged the genuine participation of children in the research process while at the same time supporting the development of pupils' competence in research and capacity for teamwork. Research suggests that involving young people genuinely in participatory processes improves channels of communication and association between young people, their friends and adults they interact with (Kirby & Bryson, 2002). The different stages of the PRP included other group contacts embedded in them, for example, group games (introduced as an initial icebreaker and at the end of each stage), snap card games (at the categorisation stage) and group work to develop a pictorial representation of the data (schema - the analysis stage). All these process can contribute to making the PRP an effective tool to engage pupils in the research process.

Within the HPS concept, the principles of empowerment and action competence represent the overall aim of HPS and emphasises the importance of developing the abilities, commitment and competence of young people in order to enable them to increase control over, and to improve, their health (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006; Buijs, 2009). In this study, and in order to mirror the topic being investigated (participation), the PRP was used as a method that involved pupils in the research process while simultaneously building their research capacity. This method suggests that pupils' ability and competence may have been developed in the process of participating in the research process, by involving them in developing and generating their own ideas, and also categorising and analysing conceptual definitions of participation in school life from their own perspectives; this method therefore demonstrates a possible link between children's participation and empowerment within school settings (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006; Buijs, 2009; WHO, 1997). In

addition, it is suggested that the use of the PRP with children in this study reinforced the ethical perspective on child participation (e.g., UN, 1989) and the argument that participation should include the active involvement of contributors (Rifkin *et al.*, 1988).

d. Children's conceptualisation of participation in school - a unique contribution of this study

This study is unique in that the conceptual definitions and descriptions of participation in school were developed from pupils' perspectives. In literature on researching children's participation in school, children's opinion are not normally the first point of reference but this research has demonstrated and suggests that the perspectives of children could be used to develop conceptual definitions for child participation research. In addition, the findings of this study have demonstrated an important dimension of participation—the children's view. These are important contributions to research on child participation; they are significant and have the ability to translate the concept of participation within the HPS into practice. These findings contribute to the argument that child participation should include effective communication with children to encourage them to share their views about a discourse and their views or ideas becoming active in consequent decisions and actions taken (Mager & Nowak, 2010; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Rifkin *et al.*, 1988). This perspective was addressed in this study with children's conceptualisations of participation in school life informing the definitional background of school participation and consequently used to develop the questionnaires for the quantitative phase of the study.

Within the literature on participation, different definitions are used to describe the concept of child participation. The conceptualisations of child participation includes children collaborating with others on issues that involves their collective wellbeing (Chawla, 2001), expressing their views in the classroom on different subjects in order to create an environment that enhance the development of their cognitive skills (Simovska, 2007) or the process of engaging children's interest in different programmes (Simovska, 2004). These conceptual definitions were theoretically developed through dialogue with teachers and students (Simovska, 2004) or through discussions and presentations by researchers and practitioners in a child participation

meeting (Chawla, 2001). In addition and more importantly, within the HPS model, the concept of child participation in the literature has been described within the context of the decision-making processes in school (e.g., Griebler & Nowak, 2012; Mager & Nowak, 2010; Simovska, 2007; Simovska, 2004). However, the concept of child participation in this study was mainly based on children's views. Therefore the conceptualisation of participation used in this study contrasts substantially with those previously proposed.

Pupils placed more emphasis on interpersonal relationships and belonging as important aspects of taking part in school life than on involvement in decision-making. Participation in school life was also conceptualised in relation to participating in school activities and school events, which implied participation in *everyday* school life, rather than special events or activities. Simovska and Jensen (2009) argued that children being allowed to participate in activities that are of interest to them contributes both to their cognitive development and increased capacity in learning. Although some of children's conceptualisations of school participation in this study corresponds to the literature on child participation (e.g., Chawla, 2001; Simovska, 2004), this study proposed that the conceptualisations of school participation reflects a broader perspectives than what has previously been documented in the literature.

In contributing to the Health Promotion discourse on child participation, data from this study have revealed the importance of belonging within the school setting and its potential in providing an encouragement for increasing pupil participation. An outstanding question remains in relation to the role of belonging in defining the concept of child participation. Looking at the aim of the HPS in promoting the health and wellbeing of the whole school, with pupil participation as one of the key values of the HPS approach, the issue of belonging in the school appears vital in defining what makes pupil participation real. The data therefore suggest a theoretical debate in relation to the concept of child participation and whether the issue of belonging in school is the first step necessary in describing the decision-making aspect of child participation. It has previously been argued that pupil participation in school life has the potential to empower students' decision-making processes (Simovska, 2000) and thus contribute to strengthening the capacity of a school to be holistically healthy.

This implies that the issue of belonging and interpersonal relationships in conceptualising pupil participation in school life from children's perspectives has the potential to empower the decision-making processes of pupils within school contexts. In addition, it is proposed that the issue of belonging may be considered as an additional principle in describing or conceptualising the values inherent to the HPS approach.

Pupils also indicated that wearing school uniforms identified them with their school and that relationships with friends and teachers were important in making them feel a part of their school. This supports the argument that the close connection of children with their environment has the potential to constitute a determining factor for the enhancement of children's participation in the school setting (Simovska, 2004).

This study expands on existing research on child participation in school life; the dimensions of school participation used as measures of child participation in this study were based primarily on the perspectives of pupils themselves, resulting in a broader definition of participation than any previous work. This study demonstrates that children's views are important when considering measurements related to the concepts of children's participation in school life and the development of child participation indices might comprise more dimensions than previously outlined in the literature. This therefore suggests a broader working definition of participation in school life as employed in this study; that is, the general participation of pupils in everyday school life (including school activities and school events); decision-making by pupils; interpersonal relationships in the school environment; having a sense of belonging and ensuring equal participation of all pupils within the school.

e. Association between children's participation in school life and health and wellbeing outcomes

This study addressed the connection between pupil participation, school environments and positive health and wellbeing. A mixed methods approach was chosen, which first engaged with pupils to gather their views on the conceptualisation of children's participation in school life and, secondly, used this information to construct the questionnaire. The findings from this study identified associations between participation of pupils in school life and pupils' health and

wellbeing outcomes. This finding implies that promoting positive health outcomes for pupils may be improved by encouraging developments in the participation of children in everyday school life. However, other factors that could affect pupils' health outcomes should also be taken into consideration. The association between pupils' participation in school life and socio-ecological school environment suggests that pupil participation has the potential to enhance positive school environment and school relationships.

f. Socio-ecological school environments and children's health and wellbeing outcomes

The findings from this study add to the limited evidence from the literature on the link between school socio-ecological environments and general health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils; the findings show positive associations between the school socio-ecological environment (highlighting the intrapersonal, interpersonal, policy and community characteristics of the school) and general health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils (emphasising pupils' self-rated health, happiness, self-esteem and life satisfaction). In addition, these findings show associations between school socio-ecological environment and general health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils in a broad range of school types including HPS and NHPS, urban and rural, single gender and mixed schools and disadvantaged (DEIS) and non-disadvantaged (non-DEIS) schools, and gender. These findings presuppose that the school socio-ecological environment is relevant for encouraging improved health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils and suggests its' significance to school health promotion.

These findings also highlight and stress the overall strategies within the HPS model and corroborate the socio-ecological characteristics of the HPS in improving the health of the whole school environment including pupils (WHO, 2011). Health Promotion emphasises connections with people beyond individual levels and stresses interactions at socio-ecological levels and its effect on the health of individuals in a setting (Stokols, 1992). It has been argued that health promotion programmes should target the environment within which people function in their day to day life in order to encourage improvements in health outcomes (e.g., Stokols, 1992) and environmental contexts within health promotion programmes could have potential influences on health and health behaviours of populations (Simons-Morton, 2012). It

has also been theorised that the concept of health is best understood from an ecological perspective (Simons-Morton, 2012). The findings from this study on the associations between contexts associated with the socio-ecological environment of the school and health outcomes for pupils suggest that health promotion interventions designed to improve health outcomes within school contexts should include and target the school socio-ecological environment, and not only focus on individual or specific school health programmes or target specific health outcomes. Furthermore, ecological models as described by Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1986) emphasise the influence of environmental factors, at the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem, on human behaviour and development. Literature highlights that the relationship and interactions of a child with his/her environment or settings over a period of time creates a form of influence over a child's growth and development including a child's health (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). This study demonstrates positive associations between individual characteristics, interpersonal relationships, organisation systems, community levels and health outcomes for pupils thus corroborating the influence of an ecological perspective on health behaviour. This study however also added a new dimension of focus on the interactions of pupils with the intrapersonal, interpersonal, policy and community levels (e.g. McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) within the school setting, and, on the effects on general health and wellbeing of pupils as opposed to more common focus on health behaviour of children.

g. Similarity of views between parents and pupils: parents' participation in school

The findings from this study have illustrated broad similarities between parents and pupils' views on parents' participation in school life and documents parents and pupils' suggestions on the various ways through which parents could participate in school life. Although there were some divergent views, parents and pupils proposed more similar views regarding the best ways parents can participate in school life, thus illustrating a level of coherence between parents and pupils on issues related to parents' participation in school life. This suggests that in situations where it is excessively challenging to engage parents/gather data from parents directly with regards to parents' participation in school life, it might be worthwhile to consult with children; however with the proviso that there might be divergence in their views.

## 5.7 Implications of the findings for theory

In this section, some of the implications of the findings are considered for the development of theory on child participation. It is however highlighted that these implications are proposed from this study and more research is needed to refine and expand on them.

Within the extant literature, the concept of child participation has been defined in various ways and pupil participation commonly described within the context of decision-making processes in school. This study however proposes a theoretical debate in defining or conceptualising child participation and suggests that the issue of belonging in school and interpersonal relationships in the school environment are necessary steps that could make pupil participation more practicable or achievable.

Furthermore, irrespective of setting, this study demonstrates the potential value of including the views and perspectives of the specific actors on their own roles and contribution; to this end the respective view of other education stakeholders, such as teachers, parents and pupils, are also important in providing a holistic concept for child and parent participation.

The next two sub-sections consider reflections on the Ottawa Charter and HPS principles

### Ottawa Charter

The principles documented at the Ottawa Charter (WHO, 1986), from a health promotion perspective encouraged a significant move towards a more holistic view of health and informed the development of the HPS. These strategies emphasised the importance of the environment within which people function, interaction of people within their environment and how this influence people's health. The Ottawa Charter after almost three decades continues to hold a central position in guiding discourse and research in health promotion research and programmes. However, the principles upheld at the Ottawa Charter have been criticised for their theoretical focus and inadequate emphasis on evidence-based programmes or research, and the lack of an explicit link to empirical research; thus suggesting a continuous and critical reflection and debate on the Ottawa Charter (O'Neill, 2012). The findings of this study identify with the values upheld by the Ottawa Charter in creating supportive

environments for health within settings, and with a collaborative effort and input of all stakeholders involved. However, it proposes a move away from theoretical principles and suggests a more pragmatic focus on people-environment interactions. This study identified interactions at different levels, including interactions at individual, school and community levels, within the school socio-ecological environment and demonstrates associations between these different levels and general health and wellbeing of pupils. The findings also illustrated pupils' emphasis on belonging and interpersonal relationships within the school setting. This implies that people-environment interactions, including interactions of people within multifaceted settings, as outlined at the Ottawa Charter, and as these findings demonstrated, interactions at individual, school and community levels are relevant and people's health are influenced by these settings. However, a critical reflection on the value of belonging and interpersonal relationship within the school setting as HPS strategies that could create influence on health outcomes needs to be further discussed.

In addition, the Ottawa Charter is perceived as a conceptual or theoretical tool that could guide health promotion interventions but it has been indicated that the application of the Charter in empirical research is deficient and not easy (O'Neill, Dupéré, Pedneault, Perreault, Forster, Roberge, Parent & Perreault, 2007). This study, which highlighted one of the principles of the Ottawa Charter – creating supportive environments – within the HPS concept thus propose a conceptual understanding of the Charter from the perspectives of children and parents, but underscore that the values of the Ottawa Charter may still be important in health promotion research and programmes. The importance of including the perspectives of relevant stakeholders in describing or conceptualising the principles of the Ottawa Charter could contribute to providing an understanding towards the empirical application of the Charter to day to day lives of people.

### HPS Principles

The model of the HPS highlights a supportive environment that encourages the participation of pupils in school and the school's physical and psychosocial environment, and their influence on the health of pupils (e.g., Simovska, 2004; Barnekow *et al.*, 2006).

The principle of democracy underpins the HPS and supports an environment that promotes learning, personal and social development and health (WHO, 1997; Barnekow *et al.*, 2006). The HPS also highlights the importance of equal access of every individual within the school setting to all educational opportunities; these two principles, democracy and equity, indicate that a HPS should be founded on democratic and participatory principles, which is conducive to promoting the health and wellbeing of pupils (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006).

The findings of this study are coherent with these concepts and illustrate from pupils' perspectives within the context of everyday school life the importance of interpersonal relationships, encouraging friendship, ensuring the participation of everyone and that all should have equal opportunity to take part within the school. These relate to the social environment of the school in creating a conducive environment for school development (Pianta, 1999) and support the HPS principles in promoting the health and wellbeing of pupils (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006; Buijs, 2009). These findings from children's perspectives represent conceptualisations of participation in school life but also highlight the principles of democracy and equity in HPS thus suggesting the possible interactions of these dimensions of HPS within school settings.

Participation is emphasised within the HPS as an underlying concept that leads to the process of empowerment within a democratic environment (e.g., Rifkin *et al.*, 1988). The HPS has placed emphasis on child empowerment and participation within school settings and identified the importance of encouraging the development of decision-making capacity among pupils. This study, in contrast, based on the participatory research methods and children's perspectives on participating in school life, placed emphasis on having a sense of belonging within the school, interpersonal relationships in the school environment and ensuring equal participation of all pupils within the school. This could translate within the HPS to children wanting to have a sense of belonging or close connection to their school, which may in turn encourage a sense of ownership and commitment in the school life (e.g., Simovska, 2004; St. Leger *et al.*, 2010). These findings also imply genuine participation of pupils in the school community (Simovska, 2004) and suggest from children's perspectives that this quality of participation (conceptualised as genuine participation) in everyday

school life, in a conducive environment, represents a health promoting process that could support positive health outcomes for pupils.

It has been suggested that participatory processes represents the basis of empowerment and participation alone is inadequate if it does not have the goal of building capacity in order to challenge latent or suppressive traditions and power imbalances (Wallerstein, 2006). The concept of empowerment is argued as being important for developing children's abilities, commitment and competence (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006). Although participation has been perceived as a strategy for empowerment, it can be argued from the findings of this study that participation may also have other functions such as belonging, which may have independent positive outcomes.

The basic values of the HPS approach include the concepts of pupil participation and empowerment and have the overall aim of promoting the health and wellbeing of pupils and the whole school community (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006). This study recognises the link between participation and empowerment but also demonstrates the positive associations between children's participation in school life and positive health outcomes. Thus it is suggested that there may be a direct link between participation and positive health outcomes; this direct association is also proposed between participation and socio-ecological school environment although further research would be needed to further authenticate these arguments. The positive association between participation of pupils in school life and health and wellbeing outcomes in this study highlighted the importance of this HPS concept, participation, in having the potential to improve pupils' health outcomes. Therefore, the link between participation and empowerment and health outcomes for pupils may require further research and conceptualisation.

This study gathered views on participation in school life from children's perspectives and indicated that participation in school relates to everyday school life (for example participating in school activities and school events and interpersonal relationship within the school environment). This suggests, as hypothesised by Macnab (2013), that the development of the HPS concept in schools does not require the provision of new resources or human and financial investments but could be identified and

promoted within the context of everyday school life of pupils in the school employing the existing resources and environment of the school.

In the existing literature, the concept of child participation has been empirically linked to positive health and wellbeing (de Róiste *et al.*, 2012; Simovska & Jensen, 2009), positive health outcomes (Simovska & Jensen, 2009) and pupils' positive views of their school (de Róiste *et al.*, 2012). Although, the findings of this study corroborated these earlier findings, it has however expanded on what was available in the literature. This study identified wider dimensions of school participation, demonstrated associations in a broader range of school types (HPS/NHPS; rural/urban; DEIS/non-DEIS; single/mixed gender schools) and among younger children of primary school age.

## **5.8 General implications and recommendations for further research, policy and practice**

### Future Research

Various issues emerged from this study as deserving of future research. In particular, there is a need for greater understanding of the relationships between a sense of belonging and the act of participation. Future research is required to determine whether having a sense of belonging in school renders pupil participation more practicable or achievable and whether there are sequential steps in building a sense of belonging in schools that could enhance the process of genuine pupil participation. Other questions emerged from this study that requires further research: do pupils want to be involved in decision-making processes if they do not feel a sense of belonging or connection to their school? In advancing the decision-making processes in the school, could the subject of belonging be considered as an initial step in achieving these?

Taking part in school activities was identified from the findings as a part of school life. Future research might focus on investigating the effect, if any, that school activities could have on improving levels of pupils' participation in schools.

This study identified the perspectives of children and parents on participation in school, and on a more general note, suggests that regardless of settings, it

demonstrates the potential significance of including the perspectives/opinions of stakeholders on issues that concern them. It however recognises and proposes for future research, the importance of the views of other educational stakeholders, for example, teachers, principals and school managers. It would also be interesting to explore the views of younger and older children on parents and children's participation in school, in comparison to the age group assessed in this study.

Further research is also required on the direction and nature of the relationships between school participation and health and wellbeing of pupils and socio-ecological school relationships.

### Practice

The PRP is a research tool that could, potentially, be employed, in addition to other needs assessment techniques that could facilitate understanding of concepts or initiatives, to interact with pupils as essential stakeholders in the school setting and to engage pupils actively as research participants in all aspects of the research process. In addition, the PRP has the potential benefit of increasing pupils' participation in school and to get their opinion on issues – both through research and for practical purposes, by allowing them to take full possession of the research process; this allows the transfer of power and control of research processes to pupils, which has the potential benefit of empowering pupils as researchers. The process of research can also be health promoting for pupils. Furthermore, in situations where it is necessary to obtain pupils' perspectives on planning and issues that have to do with them, the PRP could be adapted by schools as a (guide) tool to facilitate the effective participation of pupils thereby ensuring decisions made at school level and development of school materials are relevant to pupils' school life and youth friendly. In addition, the conceptualisations of participation in school from pupils' perspectives should be given due consideration in HPS practice.

In general, and in setting the concept of participation into operation, the PRP could facilitate a change in health promotion research and practice with school children and young people. Health promotion researchers and practitioners can use/adapt the PRP as a method to involve young people in exploring their concerns and views in relation to their health; this has the potential to inform research, practice and policy

in relation to health, Health Promoting School and other fundamental issues that concern young people.

The active actions for parents' potential participation in school as highlighted by both parents and pupils could be of practical use for schools in developing and promoting parents' participation in school life. They may also prove useful to those involved in promoting health education and health promotion in schools, and most specifically to those involved in training teachers and school principals on how to address this dimension of becoming a HPS. For example, these suggestions on active actions to promote parents' participation in school life could inform the provision of school support systems, for example, the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) support service, to provide in-service training, in school meetings or whole school seminars (SPHE Support Service, 2009) for parents, teachers and other school personnel in order to increase parental participation in school life. As suggested by both parents and children, schools could explore more practical and actual participation of parents in every day school life including, supporting teachers in the learning process in the classroom and in planning and engaging in school activities and events.

### Policy

In developing framework for HPS, the perspectives of children and parents on school participation could be used for developing indicators, and as a tool, for measuring children and parents' participation in school life.

The suggestions provided by parents and children for active participation of parents in school life could inform policy interest on developing strategies for parental participation in school.

The data from both parents and children on participation in school life in this study could be used for insightful/reflective planning and learning to support the development of the HPS concept in the Irish context.

### 5.9 Conclusions

This study illustrates school participation among children in primary schools and expands on the definition of school participation extant in the literature, and provides

an explicit look at the differences and/or similarities in HPS and NHPS schools. It documents that both parents and children have a positive view on the participation of parents in school as well as the similarities and differences between the views of parents and pupils with regard to parental participation in school. These data indicate that actions are required by multiple stakeholders in order to improve parental participation in school; this includes educational support services, schools and parents themselves.

The findings from this study further indicate that there is a relationship between school participation and positive health and wellbeing of pupils and socio-ecological school relationships; it highlights the importance of the socio-ecological school environment and its association to the health and wellbeing of pupils. The findings from this study suggest that school participation is important for children in school, is related to health and wellbeing outcomes and could improve positive socio-ecological context within the school. Interventions directed at school context, to improve school health, could include the different aspects of the school socio-ecological environment rather than specific or individual school programmes or health behaviour; this may be effective in promoting both collective and individual health and wellbeing of pupils at school. In addition, the relationships between these indicators highlight a potential justification for encouraging the development of this HPS concept (participation) within schools.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX 1**

#### **THE FOUR JOURNAL ARTICLES**

##### **1.1 Journal article 1**

Taking part in school life: views of children

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# Taking part in school life: views of children

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Child participation is increasingly a global phenomenon as stated by Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on Children's Rights. This supports the first principle, Democracy, of the Health Promoting School movement. The purpose of this paper is to facilitate a three-phase participatory research process (PRP) to document the views of children about participation in school.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A total of 248 primary school pupils aged nine to 13 years participated: the first group of pupils answered two questions on individual coloured paper; the second group categorised these data separately, by question, assigning labels for each of the categories; and the third group used the categories to develop schema. The analysis was inductive.

**Findings** – The most common categories for what made pupils feel a part of their school were school uniforms, sports, friends, teachers and their school/classroom environment. Increase in the number of school activities, encouraging friendship and equal participation were key indicators of how pupils would ensure that everybody felt a part of the school. The findings indicate that interpersonal relationships and belonging are in the opinion of children important for taking part in school life.

**Originality/value** – The paper illustrates children's understanding of what taking part in school means to them. The PRP encouraged pupils to have control of the three-phase research process, and demonstrated the ability of children to work together in groups while having fun at the same time.

**Keywords** Ireland, Children, Participation, Schools, Primary schools, Health promotion

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The school has been identified as an important setting for promoting the health and well-being of children. The settings-based approach to health promotion is founded on the Ottawa Charter (World Health Organisation, 1986), and prioritises improving the health of the whole school rather than health at the individual level. One of the principles within the settings-based approach is that of participation, which recognises the importance of encouraging the development of the decision-making capacity in order to initiate appropriate action. An increased interest in child participation and the possibility of the positive impact it could have on, not only the child but also parents, families and broader society, has been highlighted (Simovska and Jensen, 2009). Within school, the emphasis on a participatory approach to learning has demonstrated a potential for developing young people into active and responsible members of society, as well as ensuring the sustainability of health promotion programmes by encouraging ownership via participation (Jensen and Simovska, 2005).

The principles of the Health Promoting School (HPS) as outlined by the European Network of Health Promoting Schools, now known as the Schools for Health in Europe



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Network, encourage schools across Europe to adopt a strategy that seeks to promote the health of the whole school environment, including the social and physical environment of the school (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006). Individual countries across the network, including Ireland, have developed the HPS model based on what is achievable in different countries (see Jensen and Simovska, 2002); the HPS model highlights pupil participation as one of its key values. This paper focuses on facilitating a three-phase participatory research process (PRP) to document the perspectives of children about school participation.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children and young people have the right to participate freely in matters that affect them (United Nations, 1989). In relation to the school setting von Wright (2006) demonstrates that the right of children to participate in their schools has been awarded some level of recognition. This supports the first principle, democracy, of the HPS movement, which views health in a holistic way and encourages the involvement of young people in describing what health is (Jensen, 1997). Furthermore, various researchers and practitioners have contributed to the issue of child participation in the school setting; this in turn has evolved into various complementary school programmes and projects for children and young people. Many nations, in Europe and other parts of the globe, have enacted policies, made recommendations and developed programmes that enhance the facilitation of children and young people's participation in the school (Simovska and Jensen, 2009).

There are many definitions and terms (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006) used to describe the concept of child participation in school, and various levels of child participation have been proposed (Hart, 1992, 1997; Simovska, 2004; Jensen and Simovska, 2005). Child participation has been defined as a process whereby children and young people collaborate with others, concerning matters that have to do with their collective well-being (Chawla, 2001). Pupil participation has also been described as pupils expressing their views on different subjects in class, with the purpose of creating an environment to foster the development of their cognitive skills (Simovska, 2007). In addition, child participation in school has been defined as the practice of involving pupils in democratic or joint decision making in the school setting or taking part in the decision processes within schools (Simovska, 2007; Mager and Nowak, 2010; Griebler *et al.*, 2012) or the process of engaging the interest of children in diverse programmes (Simovska, 2004).

Child participation in school has been described as being either "token" or "genuine" participation (Simovska, 2004); genuine participation refers to an environment in which children are free to demonstrate their potential actively in school, which at the same time produces an atmosphere of learning and a positive effect on the children (Simovska, 2004). In contrast, token participation pre-supposes that the condition of learning has been set out and children contribute; they do not have control over the activities but can gain some information from the experience. Genuine participation has been shown to have the potential to provide the opportunity for pupils to have a sense of ownership in the method of learning (Simovska, 2007). Encouraging children to be active collaborators can contribute both to their educational and personal development and could also empower them to be successful contributors to their society. Evidence suggests that participation can encourage the development of pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem (Griebler *et al.*, 2012). In addition, pupil participation has been identified as important in nurturing a favourable social and physical school environment (Griebler *et al.*, 2012). It has been suggested that genuine participation is

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essential for the success of a HPS programme, which impacts both on the pupil and the school environment as a whole (Simovska, 2000, 2004). Children's participation in school has been associated with positive health and well-being (de Roiste *et al.*, 2012; Simovska and Jensen, 2009), and its impact on pupils' positive views of their school has been highlighted (de Roiste *et al.*, 2012).

An essential goal of child participation should be to achieve a common ground or consensus between how the child views their world and the way adults perceive the child's outlook (Kjørholt, 2001). There remains a need to define what participation in school means from a child's perspective. This paper aims to provide such a definition. The overall goal of this paper is to document Irish primary school children's perspective on what participation means to them and their views on how participation may work better within their schools.

## Methods

### *Research design*

This study used the PRP. Participatory research differs from conventional research in focusing more on carrying out research with people, and less on carrying out research on people (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995). The methods involved in carrying out participatory research centre on involving research participants in the research process, while at the same time building their research capacity (Krishnaswamy, 2004). Earls and Carlson (2001) advocate for the use of participatory methods in order to realise the potential of children to contribute to their own health and well-being. PRPs can enhance the ability of children to analyse and provide suggestions on issues that affect them (Sixsmith *et al.*, 2007). The PRP has been previously used with young children; it involves children in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data (Nic Gabhainn and Sixsmith, 2006). PRP generates very large amounts of data at various levels, which can be challenging to manage. It is entirely a group-based process and thus does not capture the views of individual participants. Nevertheless PRP was considered preferable to other possible research techniques for the current study because the approach mirrors the topic being investigated (i.e. participation), it has potential to increase the capacity of research participants and most importantly it removes the adult filter inherent in the analysis of most forms of qualitative data. The value of encouraging children's voice and the significance of including their views in policy discourse has been emphasised; participation of children in all aspects of research has been shown to be useful and also fun for children and researchers (Nic Gabhainn and Sixsmith, 2006; Nic Gabhainn *et al.*, 2007).

This study employed a three-phase participative design and involved pupils actively in all phases of the research. The first phase involved a group of pupils who generated data on two questions asked by the researchers. A subsequent group categorised the data, while a third, analysed the data by creating schema to present their views. The three groups of pupils worked independently of each other.

### *Sampling technique*

A list of National Primary Schools was obtained from the Irish Department of Education. First, three schools were randomly selected; information letters and introductory telephone calls were made to each school. An additional six extra schools were randomly selected in the event of any of the first three schools' unwillingness to participate. The first three schools who gave their consent to participate were selected for the study. Children aged nine to 13 years in 4th, 5th and 6th class participated in the study.

*Consent*

Full ethical approval for this study was granted by the National University of Ireland, Galway Research Ethics Committee. Active consent was obtained from the schools and pupils, and passive consent from parents. The pupils were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time; all pupils agreed to take part in the study and none of them withdrew at any stage of the research.

*Pilot process and language*

As demonstrated previously, there are different terms used to describe the concept of pupil participation – such as “involvement”, “linked to the students” and “student-directed” (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006). A pilot study was conducted with four pupils aged ten to 14 years to determine the appropriate language with which to describe the concept of pupil participation. A consensus was reached on the term “feel a part of” following feedback from these young people about how they understood the word participation in school.

*Procedure for data collection and analysis*

*Introduction.* Data were collected and analysed in three phases. Each phase was carried out with separate class groups in each of the three schools (see Table I). The school selected the class groups that participated at each phase of the research process; this was based on the availability of each class at the time allotted for each stage of the research process. Pupils were informed of the research aim and objectives and the confidentiality of their data were ensured. Pupils were given an opportunity to ask questions throughout the entire process. The group sessions were observed by researchers, but pupil decisions were not influenced. All categorisation and labelling was decided by the pupils alone.

*Phase 1 – data generation.* In each of the three schools, the first group of pupils were asked to give their responses to the following two questions: “What makes you feel a part of the school?” and “If it was your job to make sure everybody in your school felt a part of the school, what would you do?” Pupils were encouraged to provide as many responses as they wanted; each response on separate pieces of rectangular coloured paper-similar to index cards.

*Phase 2 – data analysis.* The analysis of the data were inductive. The second group of pupils took the responses given by the first group on pieces of coloured paper and

	School I	School II	School III
Age: mean 11.01 (SD 1.07)	11.30	10.79	10.96
Phases			
1	6th class, <i>n</i> = 44	6th class, <i>n</i> = 24	5th class, <i>n</i> = 29
2	5th class, <i>n</i> = 24	5th class, <i>n</i> = 29	6th class, <i>n</i> = 25
3	5th class, <i>n</i> = 21	4th class, <i>n</i> = 28	4th/5th class, <i>n</i> = 24
What makes you feel part of this school?	98 responses 10 categories 1 schema	88 responses 17 categories 2 schema	91 responses 15 categories 2 schema
If it was your job to make sure everyone felt part of your school, what would you do?	85 responses 14 categories 2 schema	146 responses 27 categories 3 schema	123 responses 17 categories 2 schema

**Table I.**  
Features of research participants and responses from each school

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categorised them by playing a version of the card game “snap”. All the individual responses were first dealt out to group members, so each had a pile of written responses to work with. The youngest pupil present placed the first piece of coloured paper (response) on the table, face up, for everybody to see. Others in the group looked through their own piles, and if they found a response that they perceived to be the same or similar to the one already on the table, they placed theirs on top to form a category. The game continued with similar responses being put together and different categories emerging until all the cards were used. Pupils then double-checked all developed categories to ensure they were satisfied with them. Descriptive labels were generated by the group members for each category and the responses that made up the category with the label were stapled together. Group members were free to add responses and alter categories if they wished.

*Phase 3 – data presentation.* The final group of pupils were given the labelled groups of categories as developed by the second group and asked to create a schematic presentation of the data. To aid in that process they were supplied with coloured paper (size A0), adhesive and coloured pens. The group members were free to add categories if they wished. The groups took the labelled categories and looked through the responses under each label to help them understand the meaning of each category. After reviewing the categories group members used adhesive to attach category labels to the large sheets of coloured paper in the way that that they felt represented “feeling a part of school”. Some of the groups also chose to write on the coloured paper.

## Findings

### *Demographic results/introduction*

A total of 248 boys and girls aged nine to 13 years participated, from nine classes (4th, 5th and 6th) across three mixed-gender primary schools. Table I presents the mean age, class groups, number of participants and groups in each data collection phase across the three schools, the number of responses presented by pupils in phase 1, the number of categories developed by the sub-groups in phase 2 and the number of schema developed at phase 3.

*Phase 1.* A total of 97 pupils across the three schools participated at this phase. Pupils were not divided into sub-groups; all pupils gave individual written answers to the two questions posed to them. Overall, 277 responses were generated for *Q1* “what makes you feel a part of your school?”. The responses were grouped based on school, with 98 responses from the first school (school I), 88 responses from the second school (school II) and 91 responses from the third school (school III) (see Table I). Written responses to *Q1* revealed that there were almost similar numbers of written responses given by each of the three classes across the three schools despite the fact that the number of pupils from school I was larger than the other two groups from school II and III (see Table I). Answers to *Q2* “If it was your job to make sure everybody in your school felt a part of the school, what would you do?” were a total of 354. There were 85 responses from school I, 146 responses from school II and 123 responses from school III. There were a larger number of written responses given by each of the class in schools II and III despite the fact that the number of pupils in these classes was smaller than in school I (see Table I).

There were both common and varied responses to the two questions across the three schools. Some of the written responses from each school are stated below:

*Q1.* What makes you feel a part of your school?

(1) *School I*: a total of 44 pupils, which consisted of two 6th classes merged together, gave written answers on small coloured papers to Q1. Examples of written answers given included: “uniform”, “sports”, “friends”, “going to school tours”, “teachers”, “going to school in the morning”.

(2) *School II*: a total of 24 pupils in the 6th class gave written answers to Q1. Some of the examples of pupils’ written answers were “playing with friends”, “doing PE”, “being together and having fun”, “playing games”, “having a uniform”, “the teachers are nice”.

(3) *School III*: a total of 29 pupils in the 5th class gave responses on small coloured papers to Q1. Examples of written answers from pupils include “wearing the uniform”, “break time”, “going on a tour”, “my friends”, “soccer at break”, “teachers help with hard work”.

“Having school uniform”, “having friends”, “playing sports”, “teachers”, “school”, “school work/education” and “school tours” were the most common written answers given across the three schools. However, a couple of responses from school II on uniform varied from most other answers – “I like how we don’t have a uniform”; “no uniform”. In addition, there were few responses from school III that were different from others, on bullying – “Bullying is futile in this school”; “no bullying”; on recycling – “We have done a lot of recycling for the green flag”; and on talent – “I feel like I am part of the school when everyone appreciates my talents”:

Q2. If it was your job to make sure everybody in your school felt a part of the school, what would you do?

(1) *School I*: a total of 44 pupils, which consisted of two 6th classes merged together gave written answers to Q2. Examples of written answers given included: “Have special events where everyone in the school takes part”, “Sports for everyone”, “Have everyone do a social activity such as drama, soccer etc.”, “More things everyone enjoys”, “Having friends”, “Playing together”, “No uniform”, “No homework”.

(2) *School II*: a total of 24 pupils in the 6th class gave written answers to Q2. Some of the examples of the pupils’ answers were “be very nice”, “make everyone feel special”, “treating everybody equally”, “no favourism”, “no homework”, “treat everyone equally”, “a school tour to Paris for the whole school”, “let them play sports for the school in competitions”, “by entering dramas and things like that together”, “do more sports!!”.

(3) *School III*: a total of 29 pupils in the 5th class gave responses on small coloured papers to Q1. Examples of written answers from pupils include, “I would let all sports be played at break time”, “organise a big sport game”, “no homework”, “more time for PE”, “let everyone wear whatever they want”, “make sure that there is no groups in a class and that everybody can be friends; boys and girls mixed together”, “I would let the children do what they want for an hour every week”, “get everyone involved in sport”, “school tours”.

“Treating everyone equally”, “inclusion of everyone in school activities (e.g. sports, school tours, and drama)”, “encouraging friendships”, “let everyone wear what they want” and “no homework” were examples of the more common written answers given across the three schools. Inevitably there were a few responses across the three schools that were different from most other written answers, for example a pupil in school III wrote: “Have a homework club after school”. Others included:

School I – “refurbish the PE hall”; “stop bullies”.

School II – “don’t be angry”; “obedience”.

School III – “have a school cafeteria”; “no more bullying”; “make sure they help the environment”; “help out in recycling”; “I would put up a picture of everyone and write a little bit about them, then stick it on the wall where we can see it”.

*Phase 2.* For this phase, pupils were divided into sub-groups in each participating class. Two sub-groups from each of the three schools worked separately on the responses generated for *Q1*, and two sub-groups from each of schools I, II and III worked on the responses generated for *Q2* (see Table II). The responses were divided between the groups so that each group had an equal pile. As outlined in the methods section the pupils made the decisions about which answers were categorised together and they decided what labels or descriptors to assign to each category.

For *Q1*, ten categories emerged from the 98 responses in school I, 17 categories from the 88 responses in school II and 15 categories from the 91 responses in school III (see Table I).

For *Q2*, 14 categories emerged from the 85 responses in school I, 27 categories from the 146 responses in school II and 17 categories from the 123 responses in school III.

There were both similar and diverse categories developed across the three schools. Some of the categories that emerged for the two questions from each school are presented below:

*Q1.* What makes you feel a part of your school?

(1) *School I:* some examples from the 5th class group comprising of 24 pupils, divided into two sub-groups included “sports”, “work”, “go on trips to represent the school”, “friends”, “uniform”, “learning new things every day”, “I feel part of the school because the teachers, pupils and the Principal are nice to me”.

(2) *School II:* the 5th class comprising of 29 pupils were divided into two sub-groups; examples of category titles developed were “playing with my friends”, “school”, “the work/doing subjects in class”, “acceptance”, “sports”, “uniforms”, “arts”, “doing drama” and “teachers”.

(3) *School III:* some examples of categories that were developed by the two sub-groups comprising of 25 pupils in the 6th class included “school”, “sports”, “uniforms”, “teachers”, “school work”, “break”, “friends”, “sport teams”, “recycling”, “choir”, “bullying”.

The most common category titles that emerged from the three schools were “sports”, “friends”, “teachers”, “uniform”, “learning”. However, there were a few category titles that differed from others across the three schools. They included:

School I – “being given responsibility to deliver notes to classes”.

School II – “acceptance”, which included responses like “I feel honoured to be here”; “everybody is nice-most of the time”.

School III – “bullying” and “recycling”.

*Q2.* If it was your job to make sure everybody in your school felt a part of the school, what would you do?

(1) *School I:* the 5th class group comprising of 24 pupils were divided into two sub-groups; examples of the categories developed included “no homework”, “sports”, “safety”, “nice”, “games”, “welcoming people”, “activities pile”, “classrooms”, “free expression”, “organised”, “no uniform”.

<i>N</i> = 248	School I	School II	School III
Phase 1	6th class; <i>n</i> = 44 (2 class groups merged) No sub-groups All answered <i>Q1</i> (98 responses) All answered <i>Q2</i> (85 responses) Individual responses gathered together and brought to phase 2 classes	6th class; <i>n</i> = 24 No sub-groups All answered <i>Q1</i> (88 responses) All answered <i>Q2</i> (146 responses) brought to phase 2 classes	5th class; <i>n</i> = 29 No sub-groups All answered <i>Q1</i> (91 responses) All answered <i>Q2</i> (123 responses)
Phase 2	5th class; <i>n</i> = 24 4 sub-groups Subgroup A and B categorised the answers to <i>Q1</i> into 10 categories Subgroups C and D categorised the answers to <i>Q2</i> into 14 categories Categories gathered together and brought to phase 3 classes	5th class; <i>n</i> = 29 4 sub-groups Subgroup A and B categorised the answers to <i>Q1</i> into 17 categories Subgroups C and D categorised the answers to <i>Q2</i> into 27 categories phase 3 classes	6th class; <i>n</i> = 25 4 sub-groups Subgroup A and B categorised the answers to <i>Q1</i> into 15 categories Subgroups C and D categorised the answers to <i>Q2</i> into 17 categories
Phase 3	5th class; <i>n</i> = 21 3 sub-groups Subgroup A examined and revised the original 10 categories developed from <i>Q1</i> answers and developed 1 schema to represent them; an additional schema was developed from new categories by the group Subgroups B and C examined and revised the original 14 categories developed from <i>Q2</i> answers and developed 2 schema to represent them	4th class; <i>n</i> = 28 5 sub-groups Subgroup A and B examined and revised the original 17 categories developed from <i>Q1</i> answers and developed 2 schema to represent them	4th and 5th class; <i>n</i> = 24 4 sub-groups Subgroup A and B examined and revised the original 15 categories developed from <i>Q1</i> answers and developed 2 schema to represent them
			Subgroups C and D examined and revised the original 17 categories developed from <i>Q2</i> answers and developed 2 schema to represent them

**Table II.**  
Characteristics of the three-phase PRP process

(2) *School II*: some examples from categories developed by two sub-groups comprising of 29 pupils in the 5th class were “give everyone an award for being in the school”, “make people feel better”, “do more school activities”, “more outdoor toys and games”, “I will go around the school and see what makes them feel part of the school”, “class pet”, “welcome new people”, “hold more sports day”, “designs”, “help them with their work”, “school tours”.

(3) *School III*: examples of categories developed by 25 pupils in the 6th class, divided into two sub-groups, included “sports”, “own clothes”, “friendship and talking”, “school subjects”, “activities”, “express themselves”, “school”, “tours”, “competitions”, “homework”, “break”, “bullying”, “hoodies”, “environment”, “cafeteria/eating”.

The common category titles that emerged from at least two of the three schools were “sports”, “welcome people”, “school tours”, “school activities”, “no homework”. Also, there were a few category titles that varied from others across the three schools; they are stated below:

School I – “Introducing pile”, which included responses like “learn everybody’s name”; “greet everybody every morning at the front door”.

School II – “designs” and “class pet”.

School III – “bullying” and “hoodies”.

*Phase 3*. At this final stage of analysis, pupils were invited to present the data using schematic representations, based on the category titles developed during the second phase. Pupils were divided into sub-groups in each participating class. A total of 12 sub-groups across the three schools participated in this phase of the process (see Table I).

In school I, the 5th class group took part in the third phase; one sub-group worked on the categories from *Q1*, and two other sub-groups worked on the categories from *Q2* (see Table II). In school II, two sub-groups worked on the categories developed for *Q1* while three separate sub-groups worked on *Q2* categories (see Table II). In school III, two sub-groups worked on categories developed for *Q1*, and two separate sub-groups worked on categories developed for *Q2*.

Five of the 12 sub-groups made up new categories for their schema. In total, 13 (31 per cent) of the original 42 categories developed for *Q1* were removed at the third stage of schema presentation; nine new categories were added (then making 38 categories). In addition, 17 (29.3 per cent) of the original 58 categories for *Q2* were removed and 29 new categories were added (now making 70 categories).

The outline of the schematic presentations developed by each sub-group was different from each other. Some of the sub-groups organised their presentations in order of importance; some structured their presentations to show order of importance, while others were without any particular design:

*Q1*. What makes you feel a part of your school?

One sub-group in the school I (5th class), two sub-groups in the school II (4th class) and two sub-groups in the school III (merged group of 4th and 5th class) worked on *Q1*, each producing two schema each, making a total of six schema for *Q1*. The outline and content of the schema developed varied; two of the five sub-groups organised their schema into most important and least important, while some made drawings on their schema.

(1) *School I*: two schema were developed by the sub-group from school I; one schema from the categories developed at the second phase, and an additional schema was

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produced by the same sub-group from new category titles (“concentrating”, “cooperation”, “team work”, “my uniform makes me feel like I’m in school”, “making friends” and “playing sports”). The first schema was grouped into most important and least important, and the second (additional) had no hierarchical order.

(2) *School II*: two schema were developed by the two sub-groups from school II. The first schema had no particular design while the second schema was organised into most important and least important.

(3) *School III*: two schema were developed by the two sub-groups from school III. The first schema was grouped into three groups representing friends, PE and arts; the second was not grouped into any particular layout.

The results highlight differences and similarities across all five sub-groups in the three schools. Three main categories emerged of what make pupils feel a part of their school across the five sub-groups: friends, sports and teachers. Other more common categories that emerged across at least two of the sub-groups include “wearing uniform”, “school/going to school every day/every morning”, “classroom/learning” and “school tours”. Other less common categories represented in the six schemas across the three schools included: “break time/being on the yard”, “responsibility”, “school activities (swimming, drama, music, choir, songs and arts)”, “having fun”, “recycling”, “reading together” and “bullying is bad”.

Three of the six schema developed in response to *Q1* are presented in Figures 1, 2 and 3. The schema from schools I (Figure 1) and II (Figure 2) were organised into most important and least important, while that from school III (Figure 3) had no distinct layout or hierarchical order. In the schema from school I, teachers were placed in between the most important and least important categories, indicating that the pupils perceived teachers as neither most nor least important.

According to pupils, participation in sports makes them feel a part of school because they got to play and have fun. Examples of responses included:

We have lots of fun with all the activities in the PE and it is very fun (school III).

We do a lot of activities on sports day and we all love it and get along (school III).

I feel a part of the school because I represent the soccer team (school II).

The data also revealed that pupils considered having friends as an indication of what makes them feel a part of school, as identified in some of their responses:

The thing that makes me comfortable in class are my friends around me, supporting me (school III)

Being nice and never leave anybody out of fun and games (school III).

You need to be kind and caring to make friends (school II).

One of the most common categories was “teachers”. For example:

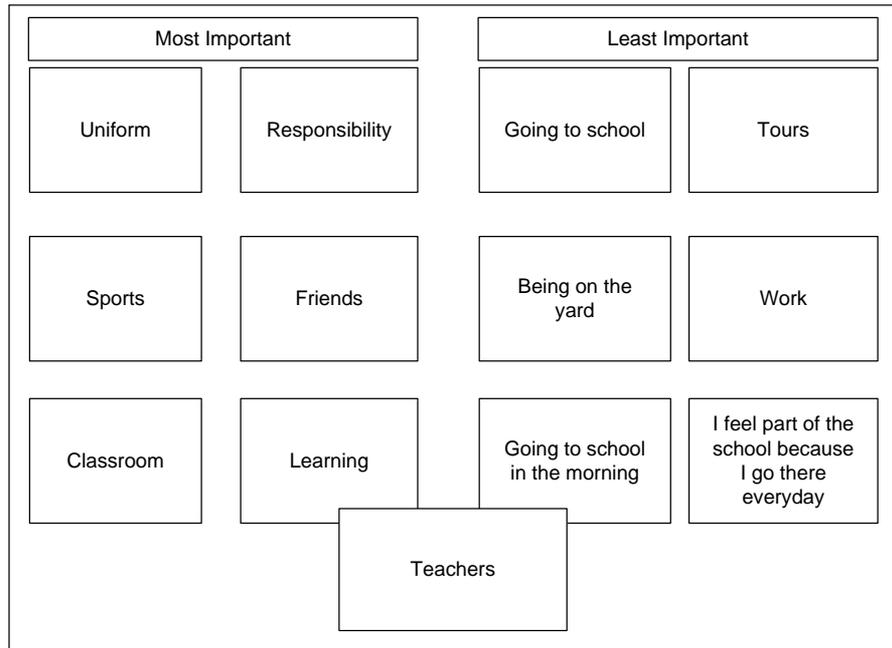
Teachers make me feel comfortable (school III).

In addition, among the more common categories that emerged in the schema was wearing uniforms. Pupils’ answers indicated that:

Uniforms make me feel like I’m in school (school I).

I think uniforms are good because you know your students (school II).

Wearing the uniform shows that we are all part of one group/school (school II).



**Figure 1.**  
Schema of school I (Q1)

On the contrary however, one of the category titles read:

We don't have to wear a uniform (school III).

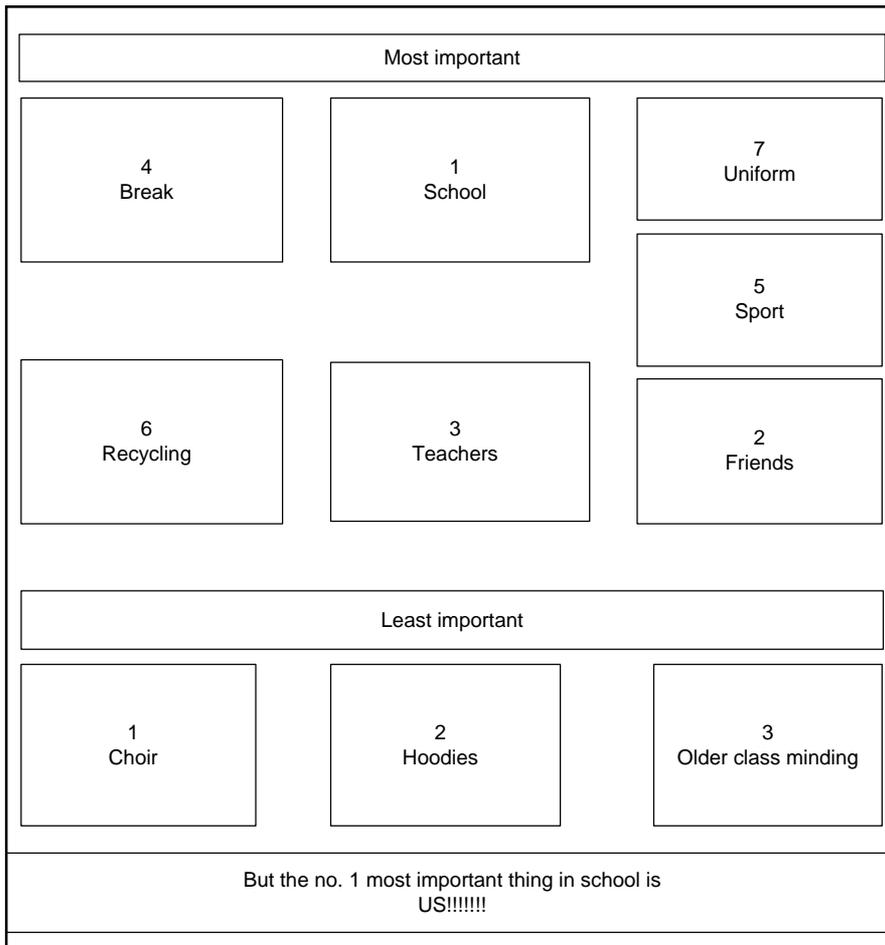
Among the less common categories were arts. Pupils indicated that:

You get to relax at art time (school III).

I love art; it makes me laugh when I get paint all over me (school III).

Q2. If it was your job to make sure everybody in your school felt a part of the school, what would you do?

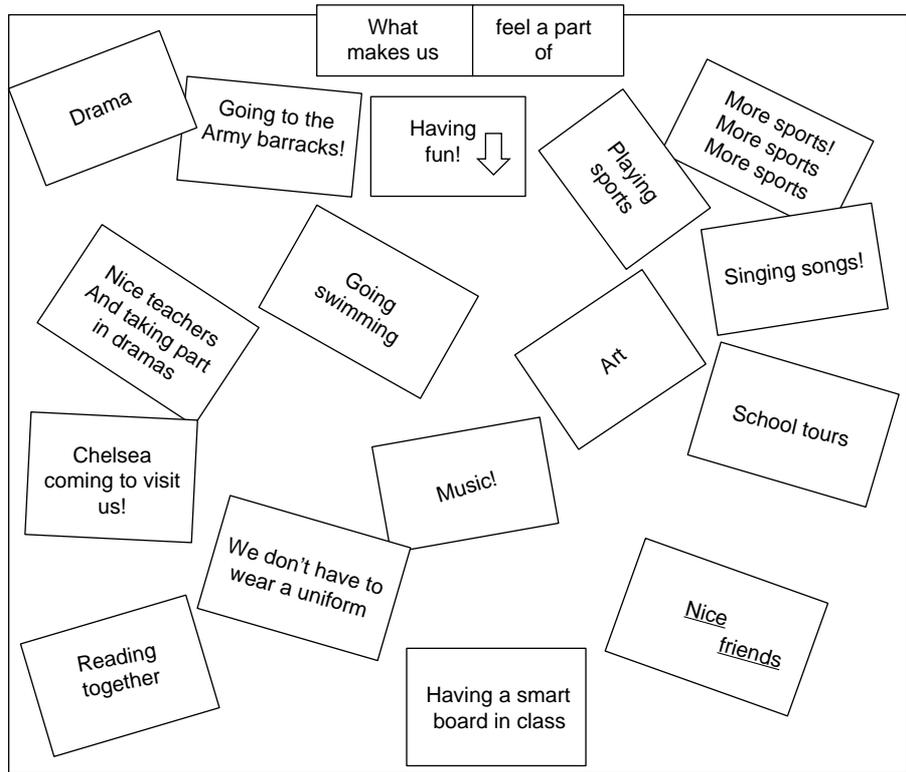
At the third phase, seven sub-groups (school I = two sub-groups; school II = three sub-groups; school III = two sub-groups) across the three schools produced seven different schema; four of the seven sub-groups rephrased their category titles to develop their schema. Three of the seven sub-groups wrote on the large sheets of coloured paper, two numbered their schema to show order of importance while others were structured in no distinctive outline. The schematic presentations that were more clearly laid out were from schools I and II.



**Figure 2.**  
Schema of school II (Q1)

(1) *School I*: two schema were developed by the two sub-groups from school I. One of the schema was numbered in order of importance. The second schema was structured like the sun, but in no hierarchical order.

(2) *School II*: three schema were developed by the three sub-groups from school II. The first schema was grouped into most important and least important; the second and third schema had no particular layout.



**Figure 3.**  
Schema of school III (Q1)

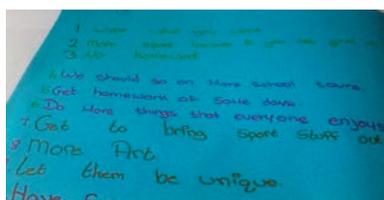
(3) *School III*: two schema were developed by the two sub-groups from school III. The two schema had no particular design.

Three of the schema developed for *Q2* are presented in Figures 4, 5 and 6. Pupils from school I numbered their categories in order of importance (Figure 4), those from school II grouped their schema into most important and least important and each category title was numbered (Figure 5), while the schema from school III did not have a hierarchical order (Figure 6).

“Taking part in school activities like sports, school tours/trips, drama, arts, school clubs” and “after school activities” were among the most frequent categories that emerged from the pupils’ schema in all the seven sub-groups.

“Taking part in sports” was the most common school activity that appeared in the schema. Examples include:

More sport because if you are good at sport and not good at school work, then you will feel more welcome (school I).



1. Wear what you want
2. More sport because if you are good at sport and not good at school work, then you will feel more welcome
3. No homework
4. We should go on more school tours
5. Get homework off some days
6. Do more things that everyone enjoys
7. Get to bring sport stuff out on yard
8. More art
9. Let them be unique
10. Have fun

**Figure 4.**  
Schema of school I (Q2)

Would let the children on yard play sport (school I).

Sports for everyone (school I).

More sport for younger classes; I think it would make me feel more involved (school III).

Sports day on every sunny day (school III).

Other common school activities that emerged from the schema include social activities like drama, school competitions and after school classes. Pupils' indicated that organising social activities in school could encourage more people to take part in school life:

Have special events where everyone in the school takes part (school I).

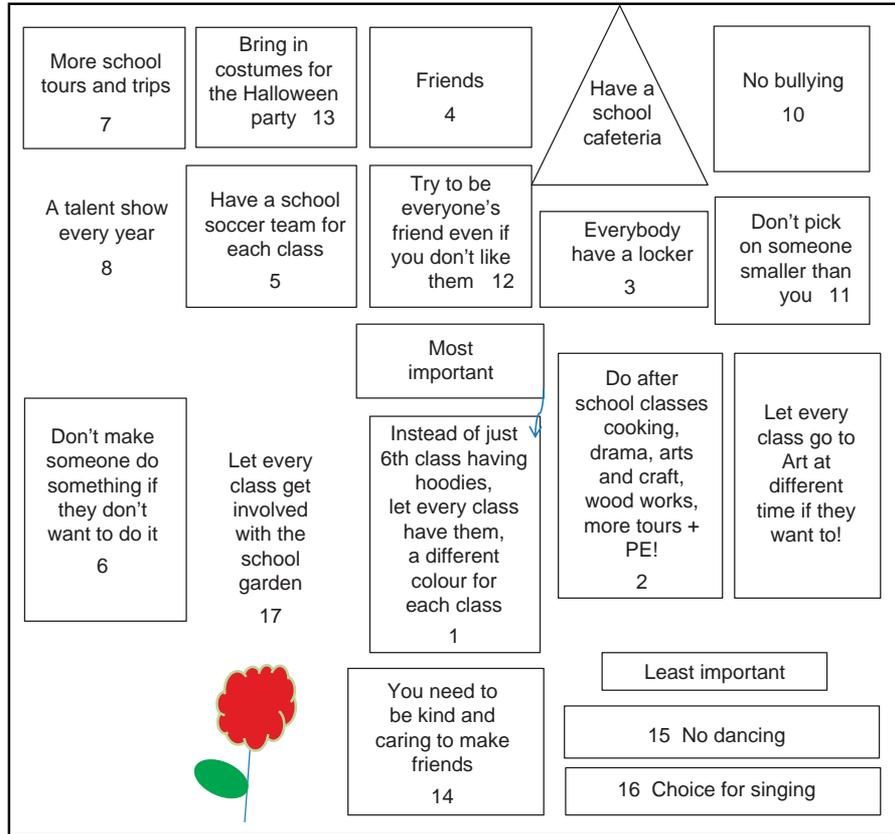
Do after school classes cooking, drama, arts and craft, wood works, more tours + PE (school II).

Have a free open day once a year with- free candy floss; soccer tournament; cake sale; fortune teller (school II).

By entering dramas and things like that together (school II).

Other equally important categories that emerged from the schema were “encouraging friendship”, “ensuring everyone participates” and “have equal privileges”. Pupils were of the opinion that “having friends and being friendly” could encourage taking part in school, and also create fun. These views were represented in pupils' responses:

Introduce new people to friends (school I).



**Figure 5.**  
Schema of school II (Q2)

Open up more sports/clubs so children can make friends (school I).

Try to be everyone's friend even if you don't like them (school II).

Make sure that there is no groups in a class and that everybody can be friends; boys and girls mixed together (school III).

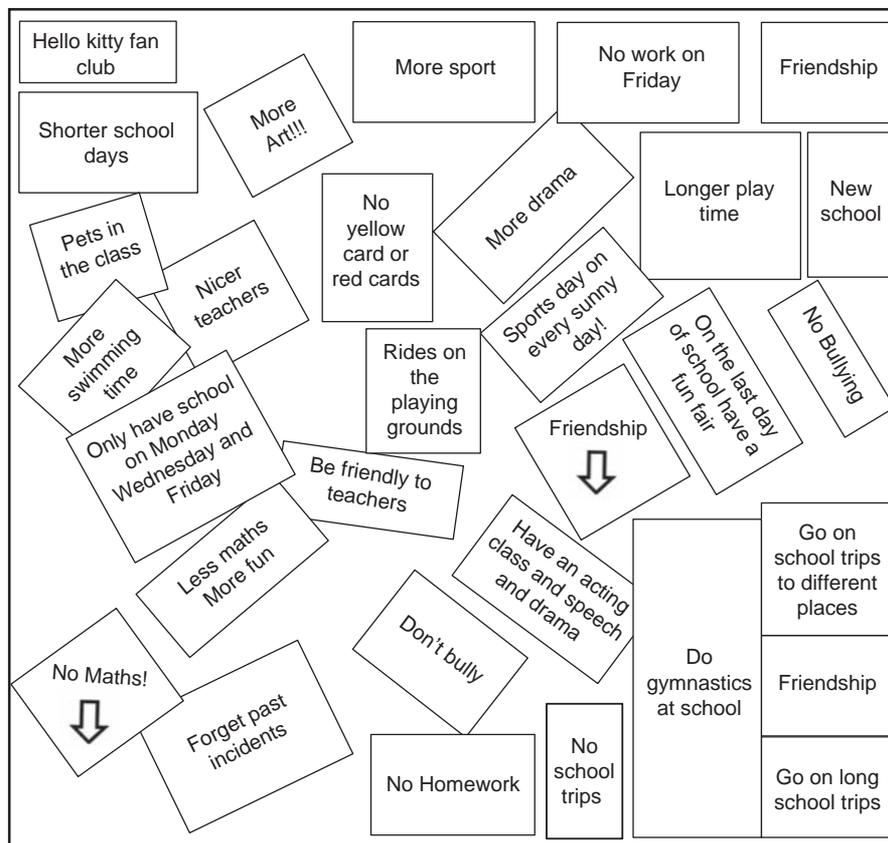
I would let every child meet up in the morning and talk to each other (school III).

I would make sure every nation of children get along together (school III).

Pupils also considered the inclusion of everyone equally, in school, as having the potential to improve school participation. Examples include:

Do not leave anybody out (school I).

Do more things that everyone enjoys (school I).



**Figure 6.**  
Schema of school III (Q2)

Let every student wear and have the same thing (school II).

Let them play in the same yard; let everyone play (school II).

A pitch where everybody could play together at break; I think would make me feel more involved (school III).

In addition, other common categories that emerged from the schema include equal privileges for everyone. According to pupils, having equal privileges was considered as:

Treat everyone equally (school II).

Instead of just 6th class having hoodies, let every class have them, a different colour for each class (school II).

Everyone treated the same (school III).

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Other ideas were more focused on voluntary aspects of school participation; these include:

Don't make someone do something if they don't want to do it (school II).

Let children stay in if they want (school II).

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There were contradictory views on wearing school uniform indicated in some schema. These included:

Wear what you want (school I).

Go in school without uniforms/Let them wear anything they want to wear (school II).

I would let each pupil wear their own clothes (school III).

Time was another aspect, pupils argued that ensuring more time slots for periods like lunch break, play time and school holidays could encourage more pupils to take part in school more:

More time to play outside (school II).

More computer time (school II).

Let children have three lunch breaks (school II).

Go to the hall more; have longer play time (school III).

### **Discussion**

In this study, primary school pupils were given an opportunity to describe what participation in school meant to them. Findings from the study were drawn from responses to the two key questions posed. Responses to *Q1* "What makes you feel a part of the school?" authenticated the notion of taking part in school and elicited understandings of what pupils believed about how feeling a part of school influences taking part in school. *Q2* "If it was your job to make sure everybody in your school felt a part of the school, what would you do?" encouraged descriptions of participation from the school children's perspectives.

These data indicated that feeling part of school was on the whole related to wearing a school uniform – as it identified pupils with their school, taking part in school sporting events and their relationship with friends and teachers. The close connection or association of children with their environment has been argued as constituting a strong determinant of children's participation in the school (Simovska, 2004). Children's relationship with their teachers and other adults in their lives and immediate environment has been suggested as being able to influence children's lives because those people generate crucial points of reference (Simovska, 2004).

The data also illustrate that pupils regarded school activities, including school tours, drama, arts, recycling, reading and singing songs together as important in making them feel a part of school. It would seem that children being allowed to participate in activities that are of interest to them, contributes not only to their cognitive development, but also builds up their capacity in learning (Simovska and Jensen, 2009). Of particular interest is the importance of friends and how being involved in school activities was linked to having fun, getting to play and get along with friends. Thus, feeling part of school was described in the context of everyday

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school life and the interpersonal relationships engaged in the process; this supports the principle of the HPS-promoting the health and well-being of pupils through a conducive school environment (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006).

Data generated from Q2, which identified school activities, encouraging friendship and ensuring everyone participates, are related to the social environment of school in determining effective pupil participation within school. It has been hypothesised that encouraging children's participation can help children gain confidence and become empowered to participate in their schools and community when a conducive atmosphere is created for them to do so (Simovska and Jensen, 2009). To further reinforce the importance of the social environment of schools in encouraging school connectedness, pupils highlighted that "feeling part of school" should be inclusive of everyone. They indicated that activities should include what everyone enjoys and all should have equal opportunity to take part. Participation of children in school can help to improve cooperation and team work among pupils, facilitating good relationships between the student body, the school staff and school community as a whole (Simovska, 2000). "Having fun" and "playing together" were included as important indicators for making sure everyone felt a part of school. It has been suggested that the social interactions within and among the school community has the potential of producing an environment that fosters school development (Pianta, 1999).

### **Strengths of the study**

Documenting the voice of children on what participation means to them could be a powerful tool in improving the planning of child participation programmes. This study aimed to explore the views of children about what makes them feel a part of their school and how feeling part of their school could be improved. The PRP gave pupils the opportunity to be involved in all phases of the research process with minimal influence from adults (researchers or class teachers). Such a process is supportive of genuine participation of children in the research process. In addition, pupils' competence and capacity for team work was further developed and they had fun. Research suggests that the genuine involvement of young people in participatory processes improves channels of communication and connection between young people, their friends and older people they interact with (Kirby and Bryson, 2002). Furthermore, pupils were given the freedom to express their views of what feeling part of the school meant to them. Children feel happy and involved when their opinions are counted as worthy and expressed in an interactive and liberal environment (Simovska and Jensen, 2009).

This study identified that pupils placed more emphasis on interpersonal relationships and belonging as important aspects of taking part in school life than on involvement in decision making. In response to questions about feeling a part of school, pupils volunteered answers relevant to both taking part and feeling part of school. This suggests a relationship between these two dimensions of participation from pupils' perspectives. An outstanding question remains in relation to the role of belonging in defining the concept of child participation. Looking at the aim of the HPS in promoting the health and well-being of the whole school, with pupil participation as one of the key values of the HPS approach, the issue of belonging in the school appears vital in defining what makes pupil participation real.

Within the literature, the concept of child participation has been given many different definitions, with the definition of pupil participation described within the context of the decision-making processes in school (e.g. Simovska, 2007; Mager and Nowak, 2010; Griebler and Nowak, 2012) and how these could affect the health

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and well-being of school pupils (de Roiste *et al.*, 2012). Data from this study have revealed the importance of belonging within the school setting and provides encouragement for increasing pupil participation. Future research is required to determine whether having a sense of belonging in school renders pupil participation more practicable or achievable and whether there are sequential steps in building a sense of belonging in schools that could enhance the process of genuine pupil participation.

The data from this study therefore suggest a theoretical debate in relation to the concept of child participation and whether the issue of belonging in school is the first step necessary in describing the decision-making aspect of child participation. Do pupils want to be involved in decision-making processes if they do not feel a sense of belonging or connection to their school? In advancing the decision-making processes in the school, could the subject of belonging be considered as the first step in achieving these? Further research is necessary to answer these questions.

The PRP has been shown to be a useful tool in identifying children's perspectives on participation. The findings of this study have demonstrated an important dimension of participation-the children's view. These results are important contributions to research on child participation; they are significant and have the ability to translate the concept of participation within the HPS into practice. It is becoming necessary for children to be allowed to voice their opinion as partners in the whole school development; in so doing facilitate children in their development into constructive, creative and resourceful participants in their society or immediate environment (Chawla, 2001).

### **Limitations**

Data from this study were collected across three primary schools among pupils in 4th, 5th and 6th classes. Having a more heterogeneous group for all age or class groups during the three phases of the PRP might have facilitated more descriptions of participation in school, a broader reflection and comparison of pupils' perspectives of feeling a part/taking part in their school. Carrying out the research process in a controlled environment within a school classroom, considering the small space could have affected the process. This limitation was reduced by dividing the pupils into sub-groups of small numbers so creating group bonding, facilitating more interaction and fun. At the schema development stage, some categories were removed and new category additions were included; 13 categories were removed and nine new categories added to *Q1*, and 17 categories were removed and 29 new categories added to *Q2*. This removal and inclusion of new categories raises questions about how the original data (as categories developed) were represented at the schema development phase, especially for *Q2*. Providing sequential groups of children the opportunity to alter the data of earlier groups mirrors an iterative process, and results in the views of later participants being given stronger weighting in the final schema.

### **The PRP as a developmental tool to facilitate children's participation in schools**

In this study, the PRP was found to be an effective method used in engaging and identifying pupils' perspectives of taking part in school life. The PRP encouraged an active participation of pupils in all aspects of the research process and they were given the free hand to generate, categorise and analyse the data with limited interference. The procedure of the research process was explained to the pupils at the beginning of each stage and pupils were invited to ask questions if they needed any

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clarifications. At the end of each stage of the research process, pupils were asked as a form of feedback on their opinion about the process and if they enjoyed it. Across all three schools, pupils responded that they were happy with the process and thought that it was fun. The researchers also observed that the pupils enjoyed each stage of the research process and it encouraged group process.

In order to increase pupils' participation in school and to get their opinion on issues – both through research and for practical purposes, the PRP has the potential benefit of liaising with pupils as essential stakeholders in the school setting and engaging (involving) pupils as research participants in all aspects of the research process, by allowing them to take full possession of the research process; this allows the transfer of power and control of research processes to pupils, which has the potential benefit of empowering pupils as researchers. The process of research can also be health promoting for pupils. Schools can adapt the PRP as a (guide) tool to facilitate the involvement of pupils to participate more effectively, also relevant for getting the perspectives of pupils on planning and issues that concerns pupils and ensuring decisions made at school level and development of school materials are relevant to pupils' school life and youth friendly.

The PRP includes other group contacts embedded in the different stages of the research process namely the introduction to the research process of an icebreaker (e.g. group game), snap card games (used during the categorisation stage), group work to develop a pictorial representation of the data (schema) and group game at the end of each stage as time permits. All can contribute to making the PRP an effective tool to engage pupils in the research process.

The PRP could facilitate a change in health promotion research and practice with school children and young people. Health promotion researchers and practitioners can use/adapt the PRP as a method to engage with young people to explore their concerns and perspectives in relation to their health; this has the potential to inform research, practice and policy in relation to the health, HPS and other issues that concern young people.

### **Conclusion and implications**

This study has shown the value of including children as active participants in research; children as young as nine –to 13 years have a clear understanding of what participation in their schools means to them. School children's contributions should be given due recognition. Exploring children's views on participation can help to ensure genuine participation of pupils in schools. Additional research is required to assess socio-ecological perspectives of the role of children participation and other HPS relevant outcomes.

Various areas emerged from this study as deserving of future research. In particular, there is a need for greater understanding of the relationships between a sense of belonging and the act of participation. Future research could explore whether belonging is a crucial step in enhancing decision-making processes in school. In the school context, the relationship between bullying and participation is also deserving of more detailed attention. Taking part in school activities was identified from the findings as a part of school life. Future research might focus on the effect, if any, school activities could have on improving levels of pupils' participation in schools.

These areas of research should also have impact on our conceptualisation of participation more generally and specifically within the framework of HPS.

The identified link between “belonging” and “activity” for children of this age may be a crucial step in realising the potential role of children’s participation in school life. Thus this may strengthen our understanding of the processes required for strengthening the capacity of school to enhance and promote health. Irrespective of setting, this study demonstrates the potential value of including the views and perspectives of the specific actors on their own roles and contribution; to this end the respective view of other education stakeholders, such as teachers and parents, are also important.

The definitions of participation from the perspectives of children should be given due consideration in HPS practice. Indeed the application of the PRP in practice settings could well compliment other needs assessment techniques and facilitate greater understanding of required initiatives and actions. In addition, the perspectives of children on school participation could be used for developing indicators and as a tool for measuring children’s participation in school life.

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## **1.2 Journal article 2**

Children's participation in school: a cross-sectional study of the relationship between school environments, participation and health and wellbeing outcomes

Yetunde Olufisayo John-Akinola and Saoirse Nic Gabhainn  
BMC Public Health, 2014, 14:964

# Children's participation in school: a cross-sectional study of the relationship between school environments, participation and health and well-being outcomes

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## Abstract

### Background

Schools are a key setting for health promotion and improvement activities and the psychosocial environment of the school is an important dimension for promoting the health and well-being of children. The development of Health Promoting Schools (HPS) draws on the settings-based approach to health promotion and includes child participation as one of its basic values. This paper investigates the relationships between child participation, the school environment and child outcomes.

### Methods

Study participants were recruited from nine primary schools, three of which were designated as Health Promoting Schools (HPS). Each HPS was matched with two non-HPS (NHPS) with similar characteristics. Two hundred and thirty-one pupils in the 4th-6th class groups completed self-report questionnaires to document their perspectives on the school socio-ecological environment, how they take part in school life, school processes and their health and well-being.

### Results

School participation was measured with four scales: participation in school decisions and rules, school activities, school events and positive perception of school participation. The differences in the reported mean score for three of the four scales were marginal and not statistically significant. However, the mean score for reported positive perception of school participation was significantly lower ( $\chi^2 = 5.13$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) among pupils in HPS (mean = 26.03; SD 3.37) compared to NHPS (mean = 26.30; SD 3.36). Participation in school

decisions and rules (OR 1.22, 95% CI 1.12-1.33), participating in school activities (OR 1.20, 95% CI 1.10-1.31), participating in school events (OR 1.19, 95% CI 1.10-1.29) and reported positive perception of school participation (OR 1.26, 95% CI 1.15-1.39) were all positively associated with health and well-being outcomes for all pupils. Logistic regression analyses indicated positive associations between school participation and school socio-ecological environment.

## **Conclusions**

These findings suggest that school participation is important for children in schools and is relevant for improved school environment, relationships and positive health and well-being outcomes. The positive associations between school participation and school socio-ecological environment and health and well-being outcomes suggests that pupil health and well-being and school relationships could be improved or sustained by providing or supporting an environment that encourages pupil participation in school life.

## **Keywords**

Children's participation, School socio-ecological environment, Health and well-being outcomes, Health promoting schools, Ireland

## **Background**

The ecological perspective on health promotion describes behaviour as being affected by the relationships or interconnections between different levels of influence within the environment [1]. Ecological models can be adapted to investigate the effects of the setting in which an individual functions and their ability to make health promoting choices. The theoretical background to this is that behaviour does not take place in a vacuum. As Stokols [2] argued, there are mutual influences between individuals and their environments, each effecting the other, both as individuals and in groups. In the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) movement, health is considered to be holistic and to be generated from both social and ecological processes. The HPS encourages practices that improve the health and well-being of pupils and the whole school community [3] and emphasises the importance of the school setting and environment in contributing to the development of children and young people's health-related competencies and lifestyles [4].

The HPS model includes the school environment and seeks to provide a supportive environment for pupils in order to create an atmosphere that encourages holistic learning and development. The core goal of HPS is the empowerment of the whole school environment, both for staff and students and at a collective level [5,6]. Children's participation in school life, for the purposes of promoting empowerment, represents one of the key pillars and strategies of the HPS model [3,6]. It has been argued that the close connection or association of children with their environment, such as in schools, has the potential to constitute a strong determinant for the enhancement of children's participation in the school setting [5]. Thus, from a HPS perspective, the structure or framework of the school environment - the policies, management structure, 'feel' of the school in terms of the social environment, the physical environment, school ethos and curriculum - are hypothesised to be linked with pupil participation in the life of the school. This study sought to examine the relationships between participation of pupils and the socio-ecological environment of schools.

Research has suggested that child participation in school, which represents one of the key values of HPS, has the potential to foster the development of pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem [7,8] and its impact on students' positive views of their school has been highlighted [9]. Child participation has been associated with positive health and well-being of pupils [9] and could be beneficial in enhancing positive health outcomes [8]. However, much of the focus on participation has been on the processes involved in engaging young people in interventions specifically designed to improve aspects of their health and well-being, usually focusing on health related behaviours e.g., [7]. The perspective in this study, in contrast, is that the general participation of pupils in everyday school life, not just in specific projects, could be related to their general well-being. If demonstrated, this may imply that health and well-being could be improved or sustained by efforts to engage with and listen to pupils during the normal school day.

This study also sought to document the perceptions of primary school pupils in Ireland on participation in school, and to determine the extent to which children's participation in school life was associated with the reported health and well-being of children.

The study hypothesis is that school participation is associated with the school socio-ecological environment and with pupils' health and well-being outcomes.

## **Methods**

### **Introduction**

The research design used for this study was mixed methods as described by Creswell [10] and Creswell and Plano Clark [11]. The theory that underpins mixed methods research presumes that the collection and analysis of data consists of the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods [11]. The design of this study was 'sequential exploratory', which is a two-stage design that involves using the results of the first method, the qualitative study, to build into or form the basis for the second method, the quantitative study [11].

The measures of child participation used in this study were based on previous work on children's perspectives on school participation. An initial qualitative participative study facilitated a three-phase participative design, which actively engaged children in describing and defining what participation in school means from their own perspectives. Three schools were randomly selected from the Irish Department of Education National Primary Schools list. Workshops were organised with children aged 9–13 years in nine class groups in the three primary schools (n = 248) to gather conceptualisations and descriptions of participation in school from children's perspective. The conceptualisations of school participation from children's perspectives [12] formed the basis of the measurement of children's participation in this study and were used for the development of the survey instrument. Participation in decision-making processes did not arise from the children's conceptualisations but was added in order to more adequately represent conceptualisations of participation extant in the literature [7,13]. This paper presents quantitative data collected by questionnaires.

The working definition of participation in school employed in this study comprised the general participation of pupils in everyday school life (including school activities and school

events); decision-making by pupils; interpersonal relationships in the school environment; having a sense of belonging and ensuring equal participation of all pupils within the school.

## **Participants**

Participants comprised of 231 pupils aged 9–13 years in 4th, 5th and 6th classes who were recruited from nine primary schools. Three of the nine schools were designated as Health Promoting Schools (HPS) (one with only male pupils, one with only female pupils and one co-educational). The HPS were identified by the Health Promotion Department of the Health Services Executive (West) as schools that were currently actively engaging with the HPS principles, with the support of professional health promotion staff. Each HPS was matched by gender and location (i.e., urban/rural) against two NHPS in the county, which were randomly selected from the Department of Education primary school list.

## **Procedure**

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the National University of Ireland, Galway Research Ethics Committee. Following agreement from the principals of the schools to participate, introduction letters and information sheets were sent to schools, parents and pupils. Active consent was sought from parents and pupils. Parents were requested to return consent forms for their child to the class teacher. Only pupils whose parents gave consent, and who themselves also assented to participate by signing a consent form, completed the questionnaire.

Confidentiality of the data provided was assured and all questionnaires were anonymous. All questions were piloted before questionnaires were distributed to pupils during the school day.

## **Pilot process**

Three key steps were taken to pilot the survey instrument. Initially, the questionnaire was reviewed by colleagues who are working in children's research. Their suggestions and comments on clarity and question format informed revisions to the questionnaire. The questionnaires were then piloted in a primary school with pupils from 4th, 5th and 6th class (ages 10–12 years) - a similar population to the participants in the main study. An information sheet about the study was provided to the school, teacher and pupils. Pupils were also informed that all the information from the questionnaire would be kept confidential, that taking part in the pilot was totally voluntary and that they did not have to answer any question they did not want to, or, indeed, to take part at all. The pilot questionnaires were self-administered and pupils were informed that filling in each pilot questionnaire could take about 20 minutes long, but this was one of the things that we wanted to test. A total of 27 primary school pupils participated in the pilot study.

After completing the questionnaire pupils were asked how well they understood the questionnaire, if there were any difficult words and how long it took them to complete the questionnaire (the time that each pupil returned their completed questionnaire was also recorded on their sheets). Based on feedback from the pupils, ambiguous questions were either reframed or removed and difficult words were re-worded. Third, the pilot questionnaire was again given to colleagues to validate the questions after revision. Further comments and suggestions were used to revise the questionnaire before data collection (see Additional file 1).

## Measures

Ten scales were constructed for the study and were grouped under three conceptual definitions: school participation, school socio-ecological environment (see Additional file 2) and pupil health and well-being. Negative worded items were reversed before total scores were computed for each scale and normality of scores was assessed; scale reliability was assessed to determine the scale's internal consistency. The statistical indicator used to assess the scales' internal consistency was the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Values above .6 were considered acceptable for internal consistency reliability for the scales. It has been suggested that scales with smaller number of items could have low Cronbach's alpha coefficient values [14] as recorded in the parents' participation in school scale. The multicollinearity of the variables was computed to show the correlations between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The tolerance value, showing how much of the variability of a stated independent variable (IV) is not explained by other independent variables in the template (that is  $1-R^2$  for each variable) were higher than .10 for each scale, suggesting that the multiple correlation with other IV is low thereby signifying no possibility of multicollinearity [14]. The VIF (Variance inflation factor) values (the opposite of the Tolerance value =  $1/\text{Tolerance}$ ), were all below 10, which indicated that IV were not highly correlated.

### *School participation*

School participation was measured with four scales, each assessing different dimensions of school participation; 'participation in school decisions and rules' comprised a six-item scale (Cronbach's Alpha (CA) = 0.646) - one of these items (*Students take part in making school rules*) was drawn from the 2010 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study [15,16]; 'Participation in school activities' comprised eight items (CA = 0.604) (school activities were described in terms of activities that were part of every day school life, for example, arts, physical education, music, sports, drama, school tours and after school activities); 'Participation in school events' comprised six items (CA = 0.623) (school events were described as special events organised by schools, for example, sports day) and 'Positive perception of school participation' scale contained six items (CA = 0.772) (positive perception of school participation were described in terms of pupils' perception of feeling happy about their level of participation in school).

### *Socio-ecological environment of school*

Socio-ecological indicators were assessed by five scales: the intrapersonal - 'perception of school' (CA = 0.834); the interpersonal - 'perceptions of class relationships' (CA = 0.806) and 'relationship with teacher' (CA = 0.886); the school organisation - 'perception of school policy' (CA = 0.605); and the community - factors 'parents' participation in school life' (CA = 0.584).

### *Pupil health and well-being*

Outcome measures comprised pupils' perceptions of their health and well-being and were measured using four questionnaire items: 'perceived general health', 'self-reported happiness', 'self-esteem' and 'life satisfaction'. These items were drawn from the 2010 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study [15,16]. 'Perceived general health' and 'self-reported happiness' both had four response options, 'self-esteem' had five response

options and 'life satisfaction' had eleven response options. The life satisfaction scale was collapsed into five groups and relabelled to ensure that life satisfaction did not have an undue influence on the overall scores. Each item was coded or recoded from low to high and then the individual scores of the four items were collapsed into a single scale with CA = 0.723.

### ***Demographic characteristics***

Pupils were asked to report their age, gender and class group.

### **Data analysis**

Associations between school participation, socio-ecological indicators, outcome measures and demographic indices were assessed using chi-square and odds ratios from logistic regression binary models. Logistic regression analysis included health and well-being outcome measures and socio-ecological dimensions of school life indicators as binary dependent variables and school participation scales as independent variables.

Analysis was conducted using SPSS version 20. Each scale item was checked for reliability to determine the scale's internal consistency; that is, the degree to which all the items that made up each scale measured the same underlying concept. Data were screened for outliers, skewness, kurtosis and multicollinearity [14,17,18]. Eight cases identified as extreme outliers were removed thus reducing the total sample from 231 to 223. Total scores were computed for each scale and normality of scores was assessed.

The dependent variable scale scores were dichotomised into 'high' and 'low'. The median values of the dependent variable scale scores were used as cut-off values to dichotomise into 'high' (the median value score and above) and 'low' (below the median value score). All analyses were conducted separately by gender and school category (i.e., boys and girls or HPS and NHPS). Each row in the logistic regression tables below denotes a separate logistic regression model.

## **Results**

### **Demographic characteristics of pupils**

The mean age was 10.82 years (SD 0.88). There were more (boys 54.7%; n = 122) than (girls 45.3%; n = 101) and more pupils in NHPS (64.1%; n = 143) than in designated HPS (35.9%; n = 80). Eighty pupils (35.9%) were in the 4th class, 96 (43%) in the 5th class and 47 (21.1%) in the 6th class (Table 1).

**Table 1 Demographic characteristic of pupils**

Demographic variable/ Characteristics of pupils	ALL (n = 223)	HPS (n = 80)	NHPS (n = 143)
Number (n)	n%	n%	n%
Age/Age of child			
9	12 (5.4)	4 (5.0)	8 (5.6)
10	71 (31.8)	27 (33.8)	44 (30.8)
11	90 (40.4)	32 (40.0)	58 (40.6)
12	46 (20.6)	15 (18.8)	31 (21.7)
13	4 (1.8)	2 (2.5)	2 (1.4)
Gender			
Male	122 (54.7)	41(51.3)	81 (56.6)
Female	101 (45.3)	39 (48.8)	62 (43.4)
Class type			
4th	80 (35.9)	36 (45.0)	44 (30.8)
5th	96 (43.0)	31 (38.8)	65 (45.5)
6th	47 (21.1)	13 (16.3)	34 (23.8)

Note: Health Promoting School (HPS); Non-Health Promoting School (NHPS).

### Extent of pupil participation in school

Overall, the mean score for participation in school decisions and rules was 15.81 (SD 3.57); the mean score for participation in school activities was 22.25 (SD 3.42); the mean score for participation in school events was 17.08 (SD 3.61); and the mean score for reported positive perception of school participation was 26.20 (SD 3.36). The differences in the reported mean score for participation in school decisions and rules, school activities and school events scales among pupils in HPS and NHPS were marginal and not statistically significant. However, the mean score for reported positive perception of school participation was significantly lower ( $\chi^2 = 5.13$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) among pupils in HPS (mean = 26.03; SD 3.37) compared to NHPS (mean = 26.30; SD 3.36) (Table 2). The mean score was significantly higher for participation in school decisions and rules among boys in HPS ( $\chi^2 = 7.06$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) compared to NHPS but significantly lower among girls in HPS across all school participation indicators apart from participation in school activities in which differences were not statistically significant (see Table 2).

**Table 2 Mean school participation scores, overall and by gender and school category**

	Participation in school (Mean scores and Standard Deviations)			
	Participation in school decisions and rules	Participation in school activities	Participation in school events	Positive perception of school participation
	Range 6-30 Mean (SD)	Range 10-30 Mean (SD)	Range 6-30 Mean (SD)	Range 10-35 Mean (SD)
All (n = 223)	15.81 (3.57)	22.25(3.42)	17.08 (3.61)	26.20 (3.36)
All HPS <sup>1</sup> (n = 80)	15.89 (3.99)	22.18(3.22)	16.78( 3.60)	26.03 (3.37)
All NHPS <sup>2</sup> (n = 143)	15.77 (3.32)	22.29(3.54)	17.25 (3.62)	26.30 (3.36)
	$\chi^2 = 0.09, df = 1, p > 0.05$	$\chi^2 = 0.06, df = 1, p > 0.05$	$\chi^2 = 0.00, df = 1, p > 0.05$	$\chi^2 = 5.13, df = 1, p < 0.05$
All Boys (n = 122)	16.19 (3.30)	21.82 (3.25)	16.69(3.22)	25.77 (3.67)
HPS Boys (n = 41)	17.65 (2.98)	23.17 (2.92)	17.78(3.55)	26.68 (3.64)
NHPS Boys (n = 81)	15.46 (3.23)	21.14 (3.21)	16.14(2.91)	25.31 (3.62)
Chi Square	$\chi^2 = 7.06, df = 1, p < 0.01$	$\chi^2 = 1.42, df = 1, p = 0.23$	$\chi^2 = 3.54, df = 1, p = 0.06$	$\chi^2 = 0.40, df = 1, p = 0.53$
All Girls (n = 101)	15.35 (3.83)	22.76 (3.57)	17.55(4.0)	26.72 (2.88)
HPS Girls (n = 39)	14.08 (4.13)	21.13 (3.23)	15.72(3.38)	25.36 (2.96)
NHPS Girls (n = 62)	16.18 (3.42)	23.79 (3.40)	18.71(3.95)	27.59 (2.48)
Chi Square	$\chi^2 = 5.60, df = 1, p < 0.05$	$\chi^2 = 2.35, df = 1, p = 0.13$	$\chi^2 = 4.03, df = 1, p < 0.05$	$\chi^2 = 18.83, df = 1, p < 0.001$

<sup>1</sup>Health Promoting Schools (HPS); <sup>2</sup>Non-Health Promoting Schools (NHPS).

## **School participation and health and well-being of pupils**

Overall, the mean score for the health and well-being outcome measure was 15.26 (SD 2.44). The mean scores were similar for HPS (15.00, SD 2.61) and NHPS (15.40, SD 2.33); this difference was not statistically significant. As shown in Table 3, the univariate logistic regression analyses revealed that school participation indicators were significantly associated with reported positive health and well-being. Participation in school decisions and rules (OR 1.22, 95% CI 1.12-1.33); participating in school activities (OR 1.20, 95% CI 1.10-1.31); participating in school events (OR 1.19, 95% CI 1.10-1.29) and reported positive perception of school participation (OR 1.26, 95% CI 1.15-1.39) were all positively associated with health and well-being outcomes for all pupils, and for each sub-group.

**Table 3 Relative odds of self-rated health and well-being outcomes associated with participation in school, overall and by gender and school category**

<i>Univariate analyses</i>	Health and well-being				
	All	HPS <sup>1</sup>	NHPS <sup>2</sup>	Boys	Girls
Participation in school decisions and rules	1.22*** (1.12-1.33)	1.32*** (1.14-1.53)	1.16** (1.04-1.29)	1.16* (1.03-1.31)	1.28*** (1.13-1.46)
Participation in school activities	1.20*** (1.10-1.31)	1.23** (1.05-1.43)	1.19** (1.07-1.32)	1.23** (1.08-1.40)	1.21** (1.06-1.37)
Participation in school events	1.19*** (1.10-1.29)	1.26** (1.09-1.46)	1.16** (1.05-1.28)	1.25** (1.10-1.42)	1.17** (1.05-1.30)
Reported positive perception of school participation	1.26*** (1.15-1.39)	1.31** (1.11-1.53)	1.23*** (1.10-1.38)	1.24*** (1.11-1.40)	1.33** (1.13-1.57)
<i>Multivariate analyses</i>	<b>All</b>	<b>HPS<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>NHPS<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
Participation in school decisions and rules	1.10 (1.0-1.22)	1.20* (1.01-1.42)	1.04 (0.91-1.19)	0.99 (0.86-1.15)	1.19* (1.02-1.39)
Participation in school activities	1.04 (0.92-1.18)	1.00 (0.82-1.23)	1.08 (0.92-1.27)	1.10 (0.92-1.31)	1.05 (0.86-1.28)
Participation in school events	1.03 (0.92-1.16)	1.09 (0.89-1.33)	1.00 (0.87-1.15)	1.10 (0.93-1.30)	0.96 (0.80-1.16)
Reported positive perception of school participation	1.20** (1.06-1.35)	1.16 (0.94-1.42)	1.20* (1.03-1.39)	1.18* (1.00-1.38)	1.22 (1.00-1.50)

Notes: \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001.

<sup>1</sup>Health Promoting Schools (HPS); <sup>2</sup>Non-Health Promoting Schools (NHPS).

When all the school participation scales were entered together, with health and well-being as the dependent variable, participation in school decisions and rules, participating in school activities, participating in school events and reported positive perception of school participation as predictor variables, a total of 215 cases were analysed. Multivariate analyses showed that the full model containing all predictors was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(4, N = 215) = 39.98, P < 0.001$ ; these results indicate that the model was able to distinguish between pupils who reported and did not report positive health and well-being outcomes. The model as a whole correctly classified 67.9% of cases. Table 3 shows that only reported positive perception of school participation (OR 1.20, 95% CI 1.06-1.35) was positively associated with health and well-being outcomes for all pupils; none of the other school participation predictors were significantly associated with reported health and well-being outcomes. However, pupils in NHPS (OR 1.20, 95% CI 1.03-1.39) and boys (OR 1.18, 95% CI 1.00-1.38) were more likely to report positive health and well-being outcomes for reported positive perception of school participation than pupils in HPS and girls. On the other hand, pupils in HPS (OR 1.20, 95% CI 1.01-1.42) and girls (OR 1.19, 95% CI 1.02-1.39) were more likely to report positive health and well-being outcomes for participation in school decisions and rules than pupils in NHPS and boys (see Table 3).

### **School participation and socio-ecological indicators**

As shown in Table 4, the simple logistic regression analyses revealed that there were positive associations between each school participation scale and socio-ecological relationships at school. Participation in school decisions and rules (OR 1.58, 95% CI 1.29-1.93) was positively associated with reported positive perception of school in HPS (Table 4). Conversely, participating in school activities (OR 1.63, 95% CI 1.39-1.92) and school events (OR 1.48, 95% CI 1.29-1.70) were more likely to be significantly associated with perceptions of school policies in NHPS while reported positive perception of school participation was more likely to be significantly associated with class relationships (OR 1.71, 95% CI 1.41-2.07) and relationship with teacher (OR 1.61, 95% CI 1.35-1.93) in NHPS (Table 4).

**Table 4 Relative odds of school socio-ecological environment associated with school participation, overall and by gender and school category**

School participation	School socio-ecological environment				
	Perception of school				
	All	HPS <sup>1</sup>	NHPS <sup>2</sup>	Boys	Girls
Participation in school decisions and rules	1.25*** (1.15-1.37)	1.58*** (1.29-1.93)	1.12* (1.01-1.25)	1.26** (1.11-1.43)	1.29*** (1.13-1.47)
Participation in school activities	1.34*** (1.21-1.48)	1.23** (1.06-1.44)	1.40*** (1.23-1.60)	1.56*** (1.31-1.85)	1.19** (1.05-1.34)
Participation in school events	1.24*** (1.14-1.35)	1.31** (1.12-1.54)	1.21*** (1.09-1.34)	1.30*** (1.13-1.49)	1.19** (1.06-1.34)
Reported positive perception of school participation	1.43*** (1.28-1.59)	1.53*** (1.26-1.85)	1.37*** (1.20-1.57)	1.40*** (1.21-1.62)	1.45*** (1.22-1.74)
			Class relationships		
	All	HPS <sup>1</sup>	NHPS <sup>2</sup>	Boys	Girls
Participation in school decisions and rules	1.30*** (1.18-1.42)	1.23** (1.08-1.40)	1.36*** (1.19-1.55)	1.32*** (1.15-1.52)	1.30*** (1.14-1.48)
Participation in school activities	1.43*** (1.28-1.59)	1.30** (1.10-1.53)	1.52*** (1.31-1.77)	1.63*** (1.35-1.97)	1.29*** (1.13-1.48)
Participation in school events	1.24*** (1.14-1.36)	1.15* (1.01-1.31)	1.31*** (1.16-1.48)	1.26** (1.10-1.44)	1.23** (1.09-1.38)
Reported positive perception of school participation	1.49*** (1.32-1.69)	1.31** (1.12-1.54)	1.71*** (1.41-2.07)	1.57*** (1.32-1.87)	1.41*** (1.18-1.68)
			Relationship with teacher		
	All	HPS <sup>1</sup>	NHPS <sup>2</sup>	Boys	Girls
Participation in school decisions and rules	1.24*** (1.13-1.36)	1.22** (1.07-1.40)	1.26*** (1.11-1.42)	1.26** (1.10-1.44)	1.26** (1.10-1.43)
Participation in school activities	1.44*** (1.29-1.62)	1.37*** (1.15-1.64)	1.49*** (1.29-1.73)	1.62*** (1.34-1.97)	1.32*** (1.15-1.53)
Participation in school events	1.26*** (1.15-1.38)	1.28** (1.10-1.50)	1.25*** (1.11-1.40)	1.24* * (1.09-1.42)	1.28** * (1.12-1.45)
Reported positive perception of school participation	1.57*** (1.38-1.79)	1.51*** (1.25-1.83)	1.61*** (1.35-1.93)	1.49*** (1.28-1.74)	1.72*** (1.38-2.15)

	Perceptions of school policies				
	All	HPS <sup>1</sup>	NHPS <sup>2</sup>	Boys	Girls
Participation in school decisions and rules	1.22*** (1.12-1.33)	1.22** (1.07-1.38)	1.22** (1.09-1.37)	1.26** (1.10-1.43)	1.26*** (1.11-1.43)
Participation in school activities	1.60*** (1.41-1.82)	1.55*** (1.26-1.91)	1.63*** (1.39-1.92)	1.56*** (1.31-1.85)	1.61*** (1.33-1.94)
Participation in school events	1.44*** (1.29-1.61)	1.39*** (1.17-1.65)	1.48*** (1.29-1.70)	1.33*** (1.16-1.53)	1.60*** (1.33-1.92)
Reported positive perception of school participation	1.47*** (1.30-1.65)	1.39*** (1.17-1.65)	1.54*** (1.30-1.82)	1.44*** (1.23-1.69)	1.51*** (1.25-1.81)
	Parents' participation in school life				
	All	HPS <sup>1</sup>	NHPS <sup>2</sup>	Boys	Girls
Participation in school decisions and rules	1.22*** (1.12-1.33)	1.24** (1.08-1.42)	1.21** (1.08-1.36)	1.15* (1.02-1.30)	1.33*** (1.16-1.52)
Participation in school activities	1.22*** (1.11-1.33)	1.16 <sup>+</sup> (1.0-1.34)	1.25*** (1.12-1.39)	1.14* (1.02-1.29)	1.30*** (1.13-1.49)
Participation in school events	1.22*** (1.12-1.33)	1.14 <sup>++</sup> (1.0-1.31)	1.27*** (1.13-1.42)	1.18** (1.04-1.34)	1.25*** (1.11-1.42)
Reported positive perception of school participation	1.27*** (1.15-1.39)	1.25** (1.07-1.46)	1.27*** (1.13-1.43)	1.20** (1.07-1.34)	1.39*** (1.18-1.65)

Notes: \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001; <sup>+</sup>p = 0.056; <sup>++</sup>p = 0.05.

<sup>1</sup>Health Promoting Schools (HPS); <sup>2</sup>Non-Health Promoting Schools (NHPS).

For girls, reported positive perception of school participation (OR 1.72, 95% CI 1.38-2.15) was positively associated with relationship with teacher while participation in school activities (OR 1.61, 95% CI 1.33-1.94) and school events (OR 1.60, 95% CI 1.33-1.92) was positively associated with perceptions of school policies (see Table 4). For boys participation in school activities was more likely to be significantly associated with class relationships (OR 1.63, 95% CI 1.35-1.97) and relationship with teacher (OR 1.62, 95% CI 1.34-1.97) (see Table 4).

## Discussion

This study expands on existing research on child participation in school life; the dimensions of school participation used as measures of child participation in this study were based on the perspectives of children themselves, thus indicating a broader and more externally valid definition of participation than any previous work. This study suggests that when considering measurements related to the concepts of school participation, it is important to consider the views of children and so, while developing indices, children's participation in school might encompass more dimensions than previously outlined in the literature.

The findings from this study identified that, overall, pupils had a relatively positive perception of participating in school life. Results indicate that the more pupils participate in everyday school life, the more likely they are to report positive health and well-being outcomes. A notable finding from this study is that it empirically links school participation with health and well-being; this had only been previously documented by de Roiste et al., [9]. However, this study is different in that it highlights school participation among younger children (in primary schools) with a much broader definition of school participation, and an explicit look at differences and/or similarities in HPS and NHPS schools.

The mean scores for other dimensions of school participation were marginal between HPS and NHPS except for positive perception of school participation. It might be expected that schools that were reportedly actively engaging with the HPS principles would demonstrate higher levels of pupil participation. However being a HPS school in this context means a school that is striving to become 'Health Promoting', and thus is working on the application of the core concepts and principles of HPS – but may not yet have achieved them from any objective perspective. In addition, as the principles of HPS are derived in part from good educational practice, it may well be that schools categorised as NHPS are engaged in similar activities.

Participation in school has previously been linked to the health and well-being of pupils [9]. Findings from the current study corroborate this and have identified that all dimensions of school participation were positively associated with reported positive health and well-being outcomes, and the multivariate model provides an indication of the unique contribution of pupils' positive perception of school participation above that of other measures of school participation. This finding implies that pupils' health and well-being could be improved by encouraging improvements in the participation of children in school, albeit while also attending to other factors that affect pupils' health and well-being within the school setting. It has been suggested that school participation has the potential to enhance positive health outcomes and improve pupils' perception of their school [9]. School participation and health and well-being outcomes are not systematically different between HPS and NHPS, though there are some marginal differences. The HPS seeks to improve the health of pupils and the

whole school environment and it has been documented that pupils in schools that are endeavouring to implement the whole school approach within the context of the HPS concept show more positive health improvements than those in schools that are not yet doing so [19]. The non-systematic differences between HPS and NHPS in this study therefore suggest that there needs to be better clarity between factors that distinguish HPS from NHPS among Irish schools.

These data also show that school participation was positively associated with the socio-ecological school environment across school categories. It has been previously suggested that the close connection or association of children with their environment, for example schools, has the potential to act as a strong determinant in enhancing children's participation in the school setting [5]. The school environment is considered an important component of the HPS approach [6,7]. For example, student participation has been linked with improved student-adult relationships [20]. Griebler and Nowak also showed some effects of student participation on student-adult relationships but these were reported mostly among pupils involved in the student councils [13]. Children's relationships with their teachers and other adults in their lives and immediate environment have the potential to positively influence pupil participation in school and to influence children's lives [5].

School participation has the potential to enhance the socio-ecological school environment and school relationships. The link between school participation and socio-ecological factors in schools, as shown in this study, has been previously demonstrated in specific intervention projects where the participation focused on pupil involvement in the intervention. However, this study identified a positive association from a more general perspective on participation of children in everyday school life.

### **Strengths and limitations of the study**

The concept of participation (participation in school activities, school events, school decisions and rules and positive perception of school participation) measured in this study was based on children's descriptions of what participation in school meant to them and indicates that school participation is potentially valuable for improved school outcomes and to enhance socio-ecological relationships within the school.

However, every school goes through a developmental process, improvements are not static and there could be shifts over time. This study only shows one perspective on school participation, and highlights some differences between HPS and NHPS, but suggests that school participation is important for children e.g., [21]. The lack of systematic differences between HPS and NHPS could be due to the methods of the study, or the categorisation of the schools; but it is clear that further qualitative research is needed to identify essential characteristics that define a HPS in the Irish context. In addition there are likely to be a range of other, unmeasured, factors that influence all the concepts included here, and particularly the health and well-being outcomes.

Furthermore, data from this study were limited to nine primary schools and to pupils in the 4th, 5th and 6th classes. A more heterogeneous group and a larger study sample would be required for greater representativeness. This study employed a cross-sectional design and causal relationships cannot be implied, neither can the direction of any documented relationships.

## **Conclusions**

The findings from this study indicate that there is a relationship between school participation and positive health and well-being of pupils and socio-ecological school relationships. This study highlights that school participation is important for children in school, is related to health and well-being outcomes and could enhance positive socio-ecological relationships within the school, although the direction and nature of these relationships requires more study. In addition, the relationships between these indicators highlight a potential justification for encouraging the development of this HPS concept within schools. Interventions in promoting participation at the school level and effects on child outcomes could be targeted to the school socio-ecological environment. School policies that encourage more engagement with school activities and events could be promoted.

## **Abbreviations**

HPS, Health Promoting Schools; NHPS, Non-Health Promoting Schools

## **Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

## **Authors' contributions**

YOJA and SNG developed the concept and conceived the design of the study. YOJA collected the data; both authors contributed to the data analyses process and interpretation of data. YJA drafted the manuscript and both authors contributed to the review of all sections of the manuscript. The final version of the manuscript was reviewed and approved by both authors before submission.

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## **Additional files**

### **Additional\_file\_1 as DOCX**

**Additional file 1** The survey questionnaire for the study.

### **Additional\_file\_2 as DOCX**

**Additional file 2** School participation and school socio-ecological environment scales.

**Additional files provided with this submission:**

Additional file 1: 2227185711223234\_add1.docx, 80K

<http://www.biomedcentral.com/imedia/1018003869141449/supp1.docx>

Additional file 2: 2227185711223234\_add2.docx, 18K

<http://www.biomedcentral.com/imedia/1270218516141449/supp2.docx>

### **1.3 Journal article 3**

Socio-ecological school environments and children's health and wellbeing outcomes

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Health Education, 2014 (Accepted for publication 10/08/14)

# **Socio-ecological school environments and children's health and wellbeing outcomes**

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Purpose**

Attention to improving the school environment is a common activity in school health promotion. The role of the school environment in supporting improved health and wellbeing has a theoretical base, but has rarely been directly investigated empirically. The aim of this study was to investigate the associations between school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes.

### **Design/methodology/approach**

Questionnaire data were collected from 231 pupils in nine primary schools: urban and rural; single and mixed gender; disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged; and Health Promoting Schools (HPS) and non-HPS. Questionnaire items included perceptions of the school socio-ecological environment (school perception, class relationships, teacher relationships, school policy and parental participation) and health and wellbeing outcomes.

### **Findings**

Reported school perception (OR 1.21, 95% CI 1.12-1.30), class relationships (OR 1.13, 95% CI 1.06-1.21), relationship with teacher (OR 1.20, 95% CI 1.11-1.29), perception of school policy (OR 1.25, 95% CI 1.13-1.37) and parents' participation in school life (OR 1.32, 95% CI 1.15-1.51) were all significantly associated with health and wellbeing outcomes for all groups of pupils. Very few differences emerged between different school types on the measures of either school socio-ecological environment or measures of health and wellbeing.

### **Originality/value**

The socio-ecological environment is clearly related to general health and wellbeing outcomes, which underlines its relevance to school health promotion. The lack of systematic differences between HPS and non-HPS demonstrate the lack of clarity in definitions of the health promoting status of schools.

**Key words:** schools, environments, health, wellbeing, health promoting schools, primary schools, Ireland

**Paper type:** Research paper

## INTRODUCTION

The school setting has always been important for health education because it provides a location to target large groups of children or young people at the same time, and is considered an important setting for promoting health and learning (e.g., Pommier *et al.*, 2010). The Ottawa Charter (WHO, 1986) acknowledged the influence that surroundings can have on an individual's health, and established a course for the settings approach in health promotion, which informed the development of health promoting school programmes in the 1980s. The main goal of the settings approach to health promotion is to transform a setting, such as a school, into a health promoting setting (Noblet, 2003).

Based on extensive research and practice over the last 50 years, school health promotion has developed alongside other health promotion contexts that have applied the settings approach (Stewart-Brown, 2006). Within the settings approach, health promotion in schools is understood to be a social process that seeks to encourage both individual and collective empowerment. People in communities and those working in the health arena see schools as playing a contributory role in improving the health and general wellbeing of the whole society (St. Leger, 2004), as do those in the education sector (e.g., Speller *et al.*, 2010). This highlights the potential importance of not basing learning in schools on teaching alone but also on making the whole school environment, including the physical, social and structural environments, healthy and conducive to learning (Simovska, 2004).

Many primary schools in Ireland are participating in the HPS at different levels (HSE, 2013). HPS in Ireland encourages a whole school approach in its implementation, the involvement of all stakeholders involved, improvements to the physical and social environment, and relationship development. However it is not necessary to have reached a certain threshold in these areas to be labelled a HPS, rather a HPS is seen to be striving to improve.

### *The school socio-ecological environment*

A socio-ecological perspective on the settings approach acknowledges that the environmental system, in which people function, affects and influences their health. The recognition of people's interactions within complex socio-cultural, economic and political environments and the influence of these on people's health, either positively or negatively, form the basis for the settings approach to health promotion (Paton *et al.*, 2005). The ecological perspective on health promotion could be described as a conceptual framework, which highlights the interactions between the individual and different levels of the environment; these interactions presuppose some level of influence on an individual's behaviour (McLaren and Hawe, 2005).

The WHO, in describing the health promoting school, highlighted its socio-ecological characteristics and encouraged improvements in the health of the whole school and surrounding communities (WHO, 2011).

Based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Human Development, which described how environmental factors or characteristics could influence human growth and development (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986), a socio-ecological health promotion framework proposed by McLeroy *et al.* (1988) identified interconnected perspectives at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, organisational, policy and the community levels (e.g., Moore *et al.*, 2011; 2013) and is recommended as a theoretical, methodological or evaluative tool in carrying out health improvement interventions (Moore *et al.*, 2011). Schools can be conceptualised, from a socio-ecological perspective, as settings where people-environment or multifaceted interactions occur at environmental, organisational and individual levels (Dooris, 2009) along with the effect of these different levels of interactions on individual and collective health and wellbeing. Such a conceptualisation has implications for research and leads to the aim of the current study which is to investigate the relationship between dimensions of school socio-ecological environments and health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils.

Previous school-based research has linked the school environment to specific health-related behaviours among pupils (e.g., McLellan *et al.*, 1999; Maes and Lievens, 2003), health-risk behaviours (e.g., Perra *et al.*, 2012; Denny *et al.*, 2011; Chapman *et al.*, 2011), improved school attendance (Bryant *et al.*, 2013), but not to general health and wellbeing of pupils. For example, research has suggested that the quality of teacher-child relationships could predict behavioural and academic school success among elementary school-aged children (e.g., Baker, 2006), while positive relationships with teachers and peers were found to be associated with happiness (Natvig *et al.*, 2003). In the study by Natvig *et al.* (2003), happiness was assessed by feeling happy or not happy about life at present. Bonny *et al.* (2000) documented an association between having a sense of school connectedness or the feeling of closeness to school, and self-rated health status, that is, pupils' perceptions of their health as excellent, very good, fair or poor, among adolescents. In addition, school environments have been linked to particular school characteristics, learning outcomes or academic achievements (e.g. McNeely *et al.* 2002; Mitchell *et al.*, 2010; Wang and Holcombe, 2010). Systematic reviews have been carried out on the effect of the school environment on pupil health in relation to young people's health behaviour or health-risk behaviour (e.g., Jamal *et al.*, 2013) and emotional health of adolescents (e.g., Kidger *et al.*, 2012). Jamal *et al.* (2013) proposed that the interactions of student-led systems and social structures as well as the school organisational system could influence the school environment resulting in consequent positive or negative outcomes on pupils' health. Kidger *et al.* (2012) however reported limited evidence showing the effect of the school environment on the emotional health of adolescents but they suggested that more school-level research is required on more contexts of school connectedness or the school environment and their effect on health.

A review of multi-level studies carried out by Sellstrom and Bremberg (2006) reported that school health policies had a positive influence on pupils' health behaviour and the school social environment was associated with pupils' wellbeing. However, most of the studies included focused on pupil health behaviour or pupil achievements as outcomes, not the general health and wellbeing of pupils, and only three of the studies linked school climate with pupils' wellbeing. For example, Konu *et al.* (2002), highlighted associations between pupils' general subjective wellbeing [which consisted of pupils' general perceptions of life, for example, satisfaction, decision-making, positive mood, global and specific self-esteem (appearance)] and school related factors - the school indicators were focused on contexts of school conditions (for example, surroundings and environment, school subjects and organisation, and school services and health care), social relationships (for example, school climate, teacher-student relationship, peer relationships and group dynamics), means for self-fulfilment (for example, value of student's work, increase self-esteem and possibility to influence school decision-making) and pupils' health status (for example, psychosomatic symptoms, illnesses and other diseases) but the health indices focused on absence of health symptoms and illnesses, rather than the presence of positive health and wellbeing.

Furthermore, parents' participation in school has been attributed to having positive influence on pupils but most literature associating parental participation in school with pupil outcome has been on educational outcomes, for example, student academic achievement (e.g., Jeynes, 2005; Fan and Williams, 2010; Fan *et al.* 2012; Zellman and Waterman, 1998), educational attainment (e.g., Barnard, 2004; Flouri and Buchanan, 2004) and pupils' motivation to learn (e.g., Gonzalez-DeHass *et al.*, 2005).

Although all these studies document links between different characteristics of the school environment and health or health behaviour of pupils, there seems to be limited research on the association between the school socio-ecological environment and general health and

wellbeing of pupils. As documented by Sellstrom and Bremberg (2006), it was hypothesised that the social environment of a school can affect pupil's wellbeing, although the categorisation of wellbeing differs from that used in the current study; similar conclusions were proposed by Jamal *et al.* (2013). This current study aims to investigate associations between the school socio-ecological environment, emphasising features related to the intrapersonal, interpersonal, organisational, policy and the community characteristics of the school, and measures related to general health and wellbeing of pupils including pupils' self-rated health, perceptions of happiness, self-esteem and life satisfaction; these concepts are further developed in the methodology section below.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Study participants*

Nine primary schools in Galway County (three in rural and six in urban locations) in the west of Ireland participated in this study. Three of the schools, which were purposely selected, were identified by the Health Promotion Department of the Health Services Executive (West of Ireland) as schools that were presently actively involved with the HPS principles, with the support of professional health promotion staff; these three schools were designated as Health Promoting Schools (HPS) (one all-male pupils, one all-female pupils and one mixed pupils). Six other schools that were presently not directly involved with the HPS (designated as non-HPS) were randomly selected from the Department of Education primary school list. Two non-HPS each with similar characteristics as the HPS were matched against each HPS, making a total of nine schools.

Data were collected from 231 pupils aged 9-13 years in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes. An anonymous self-completion questionnaire was used to collect data during the school day on

school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes (details of questionnaire content are outlined later in this section).

The Irish government, in May 2005, launched the Delivering Equality Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) the action plan for educational inclusion in order to address educational disadvantage and prioritise the educational needs of children in disadvantaged communities. Schools who take part in DEIS, which comprise both primary and post-primary (second level) schools, receive support to address educational disadvantage under the School Support Programme (SSP), an essential component of the DEIS action plan (Department of Education and Skills, 2010). Four of the nine schools in this study were identified as DEIS schools (schools in disadvantaged communities receiving support from the government through the SSP) and this accounted for 44% of the total sample size. Similarly, three of the nine primary schools were located in rural areas.

### *Ethical considerations*

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the National University of Ireland, Galway Research Ethics Committee. Schools were contacted initially by telephone and following agreement from the principals of the schools to participate, introduction letters and information sheets were sent to schools, parents and pupils. Parents/guardians were asked to sign a consent form for their child and each child that had parental consent also assented by signing a consent form before completing the questionnaire. Confidentiality of the data provided was assured. Pupils were asked not to write their names on the questionnaires and numbers were used for the identification of each school and for each questionnaire; this ensured all data as anonymous.

## *Measurements*

### School socio-ecological environment

Based on the socio-ecological model, the questionnaire consisted of items on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, school policy and school community links. These items were developed based on previous work, which involved an initial qualitative participative study that actively engaged children in describing what taking part in school life means from their own perspectives (John-Akinola *et al.*, 2014). These question items were developed into scales with each scale measuring aspects of the school socio-ecological environment (see Appendix).

The intrapersonal scale consisted of eight items measuring pupils' 'perception of school' (scale items include *like school, happy going to school, feel part of school, feel comfortable in school, feel safe in school, happy to be part of school and students' needs are important in our school*). The interpersonal included two scales; 'perceptions of class relationships', which had eight items (scale items include *friends are important in making me feel a part of my class, students encouraged to write down ideas, students support each other, students help each other, students enjoy working together, like reading together with other students class, it is important not to leave anybody out in class and classroom is a nice place for learning*) and 'relationship with teacher', which was made up of five items (scale items include *teacher(s) make me feel a part of school, teacher(s) make me feel comfortable, teacher(s) encourage us to say what we think in the class, teacher(s) are nice and like my teacher(s)*). The school policy scale comprised six items, which measured pupils' 'perception of school policy' (scale items include *students work together to design or plan their own school activity/school event, everybody is included in fun and games, students are not allowed to pick on other students, do activities that everyone enjoys, students are not made to do something even if they don't want to do it and school is a fun place*) and the community scale with three items, which

assessed ‘parents’ participation in school life’ (scale items include *parents involved in school activities, parents made to feel a part of school and parents encouraged to talk about things that concern child in school*).

#### Health and wellbeing outcomes

The health and wellbeing outcomes scale comprised four items: pupils’ ‘self-rated health’, ‘happiness’, ‘self-esteem’ and ‘life satisfaction’ (see Appendix); these four items were drawn from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Ireland study (e.g., DCYA, 2012).

#### *Data analysis*

Analyses were conducted using version 20 of SPSS. The reliability of each scale was checked to ascertain the scale’s internal consistency. Before analysis was carried out, data cleaning and screening were carried out to check for skewness, kurtosis and multicollinearity (Pallant, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Total scores were computed for each scale and they were screened for normality. Skewness and kurtosis provides information on how the variable scores are distributed; the scores might be clustered to the left or right side of the graph, which indicates that the variable scores are skewed; the scores might also be clustered in the centre (peaked) or at the extremes, which indicates that the kurtosis values are not normal. Eight cases categorised as extreme outliers were removed from the data set thus reducing the total sample from 231 to 223. The multicollinearity of the variables, which shows whether variables are highly correlated ( $r=0.9$  or above; variables should ideally not be highly correlated), were checked; findings revealed that the variables in the current study were not highly correlated.

Associations between dimensions of school socio-ecological environments and health and wellbeing outcome measures were assessed using logistic regression binary models. Logistic regression analysis included health and wellbeing outcome measures as binary dependent variables and school socio-ecological scales as independent variables. All analyses were conducted independently for boys and girls, HPS and non-HPS, rural and urban schools, DEIS and non-DEIS and school gender (all boys, all girls and mixed schools). Each row in the logistic regression tables below represents a separate logistic regression model.

## **FINDINGS**

### *Socio demographic characteristics of participants*

The mean age of participating pupils was 10.82 years (SD 0.88). There were more (boys 54.7%; n=122) than (girls 45.3%; n=101) and more pupils in non-HPS (64.1%; n=143) than in designated HPS (35.9%; n=80). There were more all boys (49.3%; n=110) and all girls (40.8%; n=91) than mixed gender (9.9%; n=22) schools and 62.3% of pupils were in DEIS schools while 37.7% were in non-DEIS schools. Twenty-one percent (21.1%) of pupils were in rural schools while 78.9% were in urban schools.

### *Perceptions of school socio-ecological environment*

A considerable proportion of the pupils reported positive perceptions of school-socio-ecological environment, with some gender and school type variations (see Table 1). Overall, the mean score for school perception was 26.80 (SD 4.23) with scores ranging from 8-40; the mean score for perception of school policy was 18.51 (SD 3.05) with scores ranging from 6-30; the mean score for perception of class relationships was 34.40 (SD 4.56) with scores ranging from 8-40, the mean score for perception of teacher relationship was 20.32 (SD 4.32)

with scores ranging from 8-40 and the mean score for perception of parental participation in school life was 8.86 (SD 2.08) with scores ranging from 2-12.

Perception of school policy ( $p < 0.01$ ) and school perception ( $p < 0.05$ ) was significantly higher among girls than boys. The mean scores were significantly higher among pupils in non-DEIS schools for all school socio-ecological dimensions apart from parental participation in school life (see Table 1). No significant differences were documented on dimensions of school socio-ecological environment between rural and urban schools except for school perception ( $p < 0.001$ ) where the mean score for rural schools (mean 28.72 (SD 3.10) was significantly higher than for urban schools (mean 26.29 (SD 4.35). The mean score was significantly higher for only perception of school policy ( $p < 0.01$ ) in mixed gender schools (mean=19.32; SD 2.40) compared to all boys (mean=17.88; SD 3.03) and all girls (mean=19.08; SD 3.08) schools. However, there were no statistically significant differences between HPS and non-HPS on any of the measures of school socio-ecological environment.

#### *Pupils' self-reported health and wellbeing outcomes*

Overall, the mean score for health and wellbeing outcome measures was 15.26 (SD 2.44) with scores ranging from 8-20. Reported health and wellbeing was significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher among pupils in non-DEIS schools (mean=15.71; SD 2.24) compared to DEIS schools (mean=14.98; SD 2.51) (Table 1). However, there were no statistically significant differences between boys and girls, HPS and non-HPS, urban and rural schools and single sex or mixed gender schools for health and wellbeing.

-Insert Table 1 here-

*Associations between school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes*

As shown in Table 2 below, the logistic regression analyses revealed that there were consistent significant associations between each dimension of school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing, and that this held for both genders and across all school types with the exception of rural schools and two school socio-ecological dimensions in non-DEIS schools.

Parental participation in school life (OR 1.49, 95% CI 1.14-1.95) and school perception (OR 1.36, 95% CI 1.15-1.61) were more positively associated with reported health and wellbeing in HPS (Table 2). On the other hand, perception of school policy (OR 1.27, 95% CI 1.12-1.43) and teacher relationship (OR 1.20, 95% CI 1.10-1.32) were more likely to be significantly associated with health and wellbeing in non-HPS (Table 2).

For both boys (OR 1.39, 95% CI 1.14-1.71), urban (OR 1.36, 95% CI 1.16-1.60), as well as all-boys (OR 1.46, 95% CI 1.17-1.82) and non-DEIS schools (OR 1.52, 95% CI 1.16-1.20), parental participation in school life was more likely to be significantly associated with health and wellbeing outcomes (Table 2). However, for mixed gender schools, perceptions of school policy (OR 2.01, 95% CI 1.02-3.95) were more likely to be significantly associated with health and wellbeing outcomes (Tables 2).

-Insert Table 2 here-

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this study suggest that pupils' general health and wellbeing outcomes were associated with socio-ecological environments of the schools. Irish primary school pupils had

a relatively positive perception of their school socio-ecological environments and their health and wellbeing albeit with some differences by gender and school types. The mean scores for pupils' perceptions of school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes were higher among pupils in non-DEIS schools than in DEIS schools. This may be related to the characteristics of the DEIS schools where pupils are more likely to be personally disadvantaged and to be living in a socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhood. The results showed no consistent differences between HPS and non-HPS for any measures of school socio-ecological environment or for health and wellbeing. Although many primary schools in Ireland are involved in the HPS at different levels (HSE, 2013), the striking lack of systematic differences between HPS and non-HPS illustrates the lack of clarity in definitions of HPS in Ireland. This absence of an effect may be due to definitional issues relating to HPS in Ireland, or indeed it may be that only schools suffering deficits in these areas choose to join the HPS movement. In short, these findings indicate that schools labelled HPS are not better than non-HPS schools on these dimensions of socio-ecological environment or pupil health and wellbeing but they cannot explain why that is the case.

Although there appears to be limited evidence from the literature on the link between school socio-ecological environment and general health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils, the findings from this study shows that the school socio-ecological environment is clearly related to general health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils. These finding thus underscore the relevance of the school socio-ecological environment to school health promotion. Results from the current study demonstrate that the positive associations between school socio-ecological environment and general health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils were consistent across most school types including the disadvantaged schools thus presenting a broader view across different school categories. These patterns did not hold for pupils in rural schools.

Sellstrom and Bremberg (2006) suggested that the location of schools could influence

disparities in health and wellbeing outcomes between pupils at different schools and this may indeed be one such example.

Overall, findings from this study revealed that parental participation in school life was more positively associated with reported health and wellbeing outcomes than other dimensions of the school socio-ecological environment. The literature has documented the positive influence of parental participation in school on pupils (e.g., Jeynes, 2005; Fan and Williams, 2010; Fan *et al.* 2012; Zellman and Waterman, 1998; Barnard, 2004; Flouri and Buchanan, 2004 and Gonzalez-DeHass *et al.*, 2005). However, the findings from this study suggest that parental participation in school life is related to pupils' general health and wellbeing. Thus, it could be argued that interventions to improve parents' participation in school may have the potential to influence pupils' health and wellbeing positively.

## **STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS**

This study was cross-sectional in nature and showed associations between school socio-ecological environment and general health and wellbeing outcomes for pupils. Thus, causal relationships cannot be inferred. The data from this study were collected from Irish primary school pupils, therefore, although the findings highlight consistent findings across school types, results may not be generalised to other populations. In relation to the effects of the school environment on health outcomes, it has been suggested that qualitative research is an effective supplement to quantitative studies (Jamal *et al.*, 2013). Further qualitative research is required to gain more understanding of the processes underlying the associations between school socio-ecological environment and general health and wellbeing outcomes.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

It has been hypothesised that “*health is best understood within an ecological context*” (Simons-Morton, 2012, p.6) and environmental contexts could engender influences on health and health behaviour of populations at risk in health promotion programmes (Simons-Morton, 2012). This article highlights the importance of the socio-ecological school environment and its consequent link to the health and wellbeing of pupils; the findings underscore the significance of directing interventions aimed at improving school health to include the different aspects of the school socio-ecological environment rather than specific or individual school programmes. Interventions directed at school context, instead of focusing on individual health behaviour, could be effective in promoting both collective and individual health and wellbeing of pupils at school.

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## TABLES

Table 1. Mean scores (SD) for dimensions of school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes, overall and by pupil gender and school type.

	All (n=223)	Boys (n=122)	Girls (n=101)	DEIS (n=139)	Non-DEIS (n=84)
<b>Perceptions of school socio-ecological environment</b>	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
School perception Range 8-40	26.80 (4.23)	20.14 (4.10)	27.50 (3.97)*	25.83 (4.52)	28.42 (3.10)***
School policy Range 6-30	18.51(3.05)	17.98 (2.98)	19.15 (3.02)**	18.20 (3.20)	19.02 (2.72)*
Class relationships Range 8-40	34.40 (4.56)	34.42 (4.31)	34.38 (4.86)	33.71 (4.80)	35.55 (3.89)**
Teacher relationship Range 8-40	20.32 (4.32)	26.80 (4.23)	20.53 (4.58)	19.50 (4.69)	21.68 (3.21)**
Parental participation in school life Range 2-12	8.86 (2.08)	8.67 (2.01)	9.10 (2.16)	8.79 (2.14)	8.99 (1.99)
<b>Perceptions of health and wellbeing</b>					
Health and wellbeing Range 8-20	(2.44)	15.27 (2.37)	15.24 (2.52)	14.98 (2.51)	15.71 (2.24)*

Notes: \*Statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*Statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*Statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$

Table 2. Univariate Odds Ratios (95% CI) of associations between school socio-ecological environment and health and wellbeing outcomes, overall, by pupil gender and school type.

	School Perceptions	School Policy	Class Relationships	Teacher Relationships	Parental participation in school life
<b>All</b>	1.21 (1.12-1.30)***	1.25 (1.13-1.37)***	1.13 (1.06-1.21)***	1.20 (1.11-1.29)***	1.36 (1.16-1.60)***
<b>HPS<sup>1</sup></b>	1.36 (1.15-1.61)***	1.21 (1.02-1.43)**	1.18 (1.05-1.33)**	1.18 (1.05-1.34)**	1.49 (1.14-1.95)**
<b>Non-HPS<sup>2</sup></b>	1.16 (1.07-1.26)**	1.27 (1.12-1.43)***	1.11 (1.02-1.20)*	1.20 (1.10-1.32)***	1.25 (1.06-1.47)**
<b>Boys</b>	1.20 (1.08-1.32)***	1.29 (1.12-1.48)***	1.26 (1.13-1.41)***	1.18 (1.07-1.30)**	1.39 (1.14-1.71)**
<b>Girls</b>	1.26 (1.11-1.44)**	1.25 (1.08-1.46)**	1.15 (1.04-1.27)**	1.09 (1.04-1.27) <sup>+</sup>	1.27 (1.04-1.55)*
<b>Urban</b>	1.23 (1.13-1.34)***	1.25 (1.13-1.40)***	1.18 (1.09-1.28)***	1.21 (1.12-1.32)***	1.36 (1.16-1.60)***
<b>Rural</b>	1.10 (0.90-1.34)	1.20 (0.95-1.51)	0.98 (0.85-1.13)	1.11 (0.93-1.32)	1.16 (0.87-1.55)
<b>All boys</b>	1.20 (1.08-1.33)**	1.26 (1.10-1.46)**	1.20 (1.08-1.33)**	1.25 (1.12-1.41)***	1.46 (1.17-1.82)**
<b>All girls</b>	1.23 (1.08-1.41)**	1.23 (1.05-1.44)**	1.09 (0.99-1.20)	1.14 (1.02-1.26)*	1.25 (1.02-1.54)*
<b>Mixed gender</b>	1.19 (0.92-1.54)	2.01 (1.02-3.95)*	1.12 (0.84-1.48)	2.28 (1.10-4.71)*	1.20 (0.71-2.02)
<b>DEIS</b>	1.23 (1.12-1.35)***	1.24 (1.10-1.39)***	1.16 (1.06-1.27)**	1.19 (1.09-1.30)***	1.23 (1.04-1.45)*
<b>Non-DEIS</b>	1.13 (0.97-1.31)	1.24 (1.04-1.47)*	1.06 (0.95-1.19)	1.17 (1.02-1.36)*	1.52 (1.16-1.20)**

Notes: \*Statistically significant at p<0.05; \*\*Statistically significant at p<0.01; \*\*\*Statistically significant at p<0.001; +P=0.052; <sup>1</sup>Health Promoting Schools (HPS); <sup>2</sup>Non-Health Promoting Schools (Non-HPS)

## Appendix

### 1. Socio-ecological school environment

<b>Perception of school</b>		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1	Are you happy going to your school every day?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Do you look forward to going to your school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	I like my school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	I feel I am a part of my school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	I am happy to be a part of this school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Students' needs are important in our school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	I feel comfortable in my school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	In our school I feel safe	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Perception of school policy</b>		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1	In our school, students work together to design or plan their own school activity/school event	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	In our school, we do activities that everyone enjoys	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	In our school, everybody is included in fun and games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	In our school students are allowed to pick on other students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	In our school students are made to do something even if they don't want to do it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Our school is a fun place to be	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Perception of class relationships</b>		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	My friends are important in making me feel a part of my class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2	Students in my class are encouraged to write down their ideas about things they are interested in doing in the school	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3	Students in my class support each other and this makes me feel comfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4	Students in my class help each other and this makes me feel a part of my class	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5	Students in my class enjoy working together on projects	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6	I like reading together with other students in my class and this makes me feel a part of my class	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7	In my class it is important not to leave anybody out	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8	Our classroom is a nice place for learning	<input type="checkbox"/>				

<b>Relationship with teacher</b>		<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
1	My teacher(s) make me feel a part of my school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	My teacher(s) make me feel comfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Our teacher(s) encourage us to say what we think in the class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Our teacher(s) are nice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	I like my teacher(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Parents participation in school</b>		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1	My parents are involved in our school activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	My parents are made to feel a part of our school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	My parents are encouraged to talk about things that concern me in our school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 2. About you, your health and how you feel

Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence

1. Would you say your health is.....?

Excellent       Good       Fair       Poor

2. In general how do you feel about your life at present?

I feel very happy       I feel quite happy       I don't feel very happy       I'm not happy at all

3. Thinking about the last week.....

Have you been happy with the way you are?

Never       Seldom       Quite often       Very often       Always

4. Here is a picture of a ladder:

The top of the ladder '10' is the best possible life for you and the bottom '0' is the worst possible life for you.

In general, where on the ladder do you feel you stand at the moment?

Please tick ✓ next to the number that best describes where you stand.

<input type="checkbox"/>	10	Best possible life
<input type="checkbox"/>	9	
<input type="checkbox"/>	8	
<input type="checkbox"/>	7	
<input type="checkbox"/>	6	
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	
<input type="checkbox"/>	4	
<input type="checkbox"/>	3	
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	
<input type="checkbox"/>	1	
<input type="checkbox"/>	0	Worst possible life

#### **1.4 Journal article 4**

Parental participation in primary schools: the views of parents and children

Yetunde Olufisayo John-Akinola and Saoirse Nic Gabhainn  
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# Parental participation in primary schools; the views of parents and children

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Parental participation is important for strengthening and sustaining the concept of school health promotion but little is written on the processes involved. The purpose of this paper is to assess Irish parents' and pupils' views on how parents take part, or would like to take part, in school life.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The sample was recruited from nine primary schools, three Health Promoting Schools and six matched schools. Pupils aged nine to 13 years in the 4th, 5th and 6th class groups participated in the study. Parents of all participating pupils were also invited to take part in the study. Data were collected by self-completion questionnaire, comprising three closed and one open question.

**Findings** – A total of 218 parents and 231 pupils participated. There was general agreement between parents and pupils on parental participation in school. Overall 40.6 per cent of parents and 43.2 per cent of pupils reported that parents frequently take part in school activities. A majority of both parents (79.5 per cent) and pupils (83.6 per cent), agreed that parents were encouraged to talk about things that concern their child in school, while 73.5 per cent of parents and 65.6 per cent of pupils reported that they were made to feel a part of child's school. Qualitative data from parents and pupils suggested similar ways in which parents can best take part in school. Some respondents suggested how schools could engage with parents but most responses provided examples of how parents could act directly to take part in school life. These direct actions included doing, helping with, and watching school activities such as sports, tours, music and cake sales.

**Originality/value** – The findings illustrate the similarity of views of parents and pupils concerning parents' participation in school life and suggest that children may have the potential to represent the voice of their parents in school when considering how to improve parental participation in schools.

**Keywords** Participation, Health, Ireland, Schools, Parents

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Health promotion in schools, particularly in Europe, is largely informed and guided by the Health Promoting School (HPS) movement (Senior, 2012). Although there are multiple models of HPS (Barnekow *et al.*, 2006), developed in line with health promotion theory and practice and the political and administrative realities within countries or territories, some dimensions appear universal. One such defining dimension is an emphasis on the school as existing within a wider community, and advocates for positive attention to be given to relationships between the school and the community,

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and particularly with the parents of pupils (Senior, 2012). The participation of parents in HPS is one of the four key pillars of the model of HPS adopted in Ireland in 1996 (Lahiff, 2000; Jensen and Simovska, 2002) and is acknowledged as central to the development of successful school health promotion (Nic Gabhainn *et al.*, 2010). Despite some examples of good practice in this area (Network News, 1997; Nic Gabhainn and Kelleher, 1998), there is a general dearth of understanding regarding how such participation can be encouraged and supported and specifically what the view of educational stakeholders such as children and parents are about parental participation. This paper investigates views on parental participation among parents and children in Irish primary schools.

#### *Parental engagement, involvement and participation*

There are language and conceptual issues around the role of parents in schools that require more attention. Parental engagement with schools has been described in a variety of ways, each representing different views on what the given term encompasses. Epstein (2011) referred to parents' involvement in the context of "school-family partnerships". Others have referred to "parental school involvement" (Hill and Taylor, 2004), "parent-school relationship" (Feuerstein, 2000) and "home-school links" (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). Some authors have developed typologies of parental engagement based on the types of activities involved (e.g. Dimock *et al.*, 1996; Anderson and Minke, 2007), or parent's beliefs system (Hoover-Dempsey *et al.*, 2005).

In some contexts terms such as "parental involvement", "parental engagement" and "parental participation" have been used interchangeably, but in other cases the terms have been clearly defined, although the definitions given are not consistent. Whatever the name parents' engagement in school might be referred to, it has been highlighted that it is important for the two systems – home and school – within which children function, to work in partnership with the aim of improving children's lives (Graue *et al.*, 2001). In this paper, the term "parental participation" is used to refer to a broad set of activities where schools make it possible for parents to take an active role in the life of the school and parents volunteer to take part in school activities and events. Where other terms were used in the literature reviewed the original nomenclature has been retained.

#### *Parents taking part in school life*

Various types of parental participation in schools have previously been documented. These include; communication with child's teachers and by attendance at parent-teacher meetings (Feuerstein, 2000; Hill and Taylor, 2004; Lee and Bowen, 2006); attending school presentations by pupils (Lee and Bowen, 2006); attending school events (Hill and Taylor, 2004); or activities related to other altruistic activities in the school (e.g. volunteering at school) (Feuerstein, 2000; Hill and Taylor, 2004; Lee and Bowen, 2006). Parents can also be a member of a parents association; for example, all the schools that formed part of the Irish Network of HPS had parents' representatives in their schools usually referred to as parents association. These groups, which are usually well planned and structured, have created the opportunity for schools to link up with parents, and also encourage parents to be involved in school activities and training programmes organised by schools for parents (Lahiff, 2000). Parent involvement can also be by way of reading activities at home with child (e.g. van Steensel *et al.*, 2011; Silinskas *et al.*, 2013) assisting a child with homework (e.g. Hill and Taylor, 2004; Lee and Bowen, 2006), or communicating with a child about learning experiences at school (Lee and Bowen, 2006).

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Nevertheless the participation of parents in schools can sometimes be difficult and challenging. For example, some parents are not enthusiastic about working with schools while some others are incapable of doing so; work-time balance for instance could create a hindrance to parental participation in school life (e.g. Dimock *et al.*, 1996; Ingram *et al.*, 2007; Harris and Goodall, 2008), for others language issues or parental beliefs act as barriers (Horby and Lafaele, 2011). Within school health promotion these issues related to barriers to parental participation in school have been previously recognised and discussed (Garcia-Dominic *et al.*, 2010), but no universal guidance is guaranteed success.

#### *Impact of parental participation*

Developing good connections between schools and parents can contribute to promoting school activities and improve home-school relationships (St Leger *et al.*, 2010; Senior, 2012). It has also been suggested that interactions between families, communities and schools could impact on children's development (El Nokali *et al.*, 2010), school achievement and improvement of school programmes (Sheldon and Van Voorhis, 2004) thus engendering a positive holistic environment that could support children's development and learning (Mattingly *et al.*, 2002).

Models of child development have highlighted the essential part that parents play in their child's education, and research on parents' involvement in school, and the relationship between schools and parents, has argued that it is essential for promoting school achievement (e.g. Mattingly *et al.*, 2002). Numerous studies have documented a link between parental involvement with children's education and academic achievement or improvement in student learning (e.g. Fan and Chen, 2001; Barnard, 2004; Lee and Bowen, 2006; Topor *et al.*, 2010), an increase in school attendance (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon, 2007), and the development of children's social competences (Kohl *et al.*, 2000).

Parents' engagement in school or their child's education may also have a positive impact on school-related outcomes (Hill and Taylor, 2004; Anderson and Minke, 2007), such as improvement in children's attitudes to school and academic performance (e.g. Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994; Feuerstein, 2000; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Anderson and Minke, 2007), and inclination to devote more attentiveness, energy and concentration to learning (Gonzalez-DeHass *et al.*, 2005). It has been suggested that when children are motivated to succeed in learning by their parents or guardians, they are stimulated, and thus give more attention to their academic progress (Ingram *et al.*, 2007). Pupils assume more accountability for their education when parents are involved (Gonzalez-DeHass *et al.*, 2005), and this can potentially increase children's interest in achieving high standards in their education. Parents' involvement in school has also been related to decreases in the number of high school dropouts, and increases in timely completion of school and completion of the highest grade levels (Barnard, 2004). However, while various associations and links have been reported, there remains a dearth of causal evidence regarding the extent to which parental involvement has enhanced pupils' learning (Mattingly *et al.*, 2002).

One outstanding issue is the question of how schools and parents can make the connection to help children reach their potential (e.g. Cowan *et al.*, 2004). Incompatibility and unrelatedness between the school and home can have an influence on the learning process and behaviour patterns among school pupils (Harris and Goodall, 2008). Therefore, the physical and psychosocial environment and "feel" of the school has to be welcoming for parents (Michael *et al.*, 2007) in order to create an atmosphere conducive to

participation. It has been argued that it is crucial for pupils and parents to have a sense of ownership and commitment to school life and that this can go a long way in determining a successful outcome for the HPS programme (St Leger *et al.*, 2010). For example, an 18-month pilot study was conducted in Hong Kong among primary school pupils, as part of a Healthy School agenda, which aimed to promote a healthy eating environment in the school. In that study, the participation of parents, alongside teachers, in the planning and implementation of the programme was considered a contributory component to a successful execution of the project (Lee *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, Lahiff (2000) argued that best results can be expected when parents participate actively in facilitating the promotion of the health and well-being of their children. This suggests that the relationship between the school and the home, and especially with the parents of children who are learning, has important implications for both the education and the well-being of children (e.g. Hirsto, 2010).

### *Rationale for this study*

Despite these developments in the area of parents' participation in school, there remain many hurdles that need to be crossed to improve parents' role in school settings. While parental involvement and participation is seen as generally positive, and it has been argued that school-home relationships should be supported (Mattingly *et al.*, 2002; Cowan *et al.*, 2004), there remains incomplete information about the extent of parental participation in schools. There is a need to explore and understand how parents would like to engage in their children's learning (Anderson and Minke, 2007), and in the broader life of the school. Thus, there is an extant need to document both existing parental participation and their possible future participation in schools. This paper aims to address this by presenting data from parents' views on their current participation in schools and their suggestions for future participation in the schools of their children.

As children can be said to have the right to express their views on all matters that affect them (United Nation, 1989; Department of Health and Children, 2000), a question also arises as to whether children would want their parents to participate in school life, and if so, how? The second aim of this paper is to document the views of children on the participation of their parents in school life.

Gathering data from parents can prove very challenging, and there are some unsuccessful examples of trying to recruit parents as research participants through schools or via their children (e.g. Heinrichs *et al.*, 2005; Nic Gabhainn *et al.*, 2010). In this regard, and as previously argued by Vyverman and Vettenburg (2009) the appropriateness of asking children questions about their parents' participation in school is a valid question. The third aim of this paper is to investigate the extent to which parents and children agree on the issue of parental participation in schools.

## **Methodology**

### *Introduction*

In order to address the three aims outlined above, data for this study were collected across nine primary schools. The data collection process involved parents filling in a short, four-item, questionnaire to document their perspectives on how they take part or would like to take part in school life. The questionnaire was developed following a preliminary study in which a participative methodology was employed to investigate parents and children's understandings of participation in school life (John-Akinola *et al.*, 2014). The preliminary study was conducted explicitly to facilitate understanding of what educational stakeholders (e.g. parents and children) understood participation to

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be, and to feed in to later investigations on this topic. The four questions included in the questionnaire for the current study were based on the main categories that emerged from the analysis of parents' understandings of participation in school life, and how they thought that parents could be encouraged to participate in school life. Taking this approach helped to ensure that the key issues could be investigated in an efficient and parent-friendly manner using a short-questionnaire which parents found easy and quick to complete. As described further below, pupils also completed a similar questionnaire with analogous questions about their parents' participation in school life.

#### *Sampling design and technique*

This was a cross-sectional study. Lists of primary schools in County Galway were obtained. Three HPS across the County were selected for the study (one with only male pupils, one with only female pupils and one co-educational); the HPS were identified by the Health Promotion Department of the Health Services Executive (west). The three HPS were matched by gender and location (i.e. urban/rural) against six other primary schools (categorised as "Non-Health Promoting Schools" (NHPS)) in the County, which were randomly selected from the Department of Education primary school list. Thus a total of nine schools participated. In all schools pupils aged nine to 13 years in the 4th, 5th and 6th class groups participated in the study. Parents of all participating pupils were also invited to take part in the study via a letter sent home to them with their child.

#### *Consent*

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the National University of Ireland, Galway Research Ethics Committee. Consent was obtained from the schools, parents or guardians and pupils to administer the questionnaires. The parents or guardians and all pupils were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

#### *Data collection*

Introduction letters, information sheets, consent forms and a questionnaire for parents or guardians were sent home with pupils. Either parent was considered eligible to complete the questionnaire. Parents were requested to return their consent forms, consent for their child (a section for parents or guardians to append their signature was included in the consent forms) and parents' questionnaire to the class teacher. Only pupils whose parents or guardians gave consent, and who themselves also assented to participate, were given the pupil questionnaire for completion. The confidentiality of the data they provided was assured and all data were anonymous.

All questions were piloted before data collection. Pupils completed their questionnaires in school and parents' questionnaires were sent home to parents via their children. The questionnaire for parents and pupils included closed-ended and an open-ended question on parents' participation in school.

Parents were invited to respond to the following sentences with the response options "always", "often", "sometimes" and "never": "I am involved in school activities", "I am made to feel a part of my child's school" and "I am encouraged to talk about things that concern my child in the school". Below those questions was the text: "Please write on the lines below how best you would like to take part in your child's school".

Pupils were invited to respond to the following sentences with the response options "always", "often", "sometimes" and "never": "My parents are involved in our school activities", "My parents are made to feel a part of our school", and "My parents are encouraged to talk about things that concern me in our school". Below those questions

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was the text: "Please write on the lines below how you would like your parents to take part in your school".

### *Data analysis*

The quantitative data were coded and entered into SPSS version 20. The qualitative data, comprising the responses to the open-ended question for both parents ( $n = 218$ ) and pupils ( $n = 231$ ) were imported into Microsoft Excel for coding. A conventional approach to content analysis was used to analyse the data, which was informed by Alasuutari *et al.* (2008) and May (2011) and followed the procedures outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). Categories that were related to the context of parents' participation in school were developed from parents and pupils' data.

Analysis for both the pupils and parents' responses to the open-ended question involved three stages of coding; from which various themes emerged from the data. The themes were given definitions, and were subsequently categorised into variables that represented actions that could be carried out by either parents or schools. Some parents and children gave multiple responses, and thus the numbers in each category, or sub-category, do not necessarily sum to the total number of respondents.

*Stage 1 coding.* For the first stage of coding, pupils and parents' data were treated separately. However given that many of the same themes emerged, some codes were shared between the two data sets. The major themes focused on actions that could be carried out directly by schools or by parents. These included how parents had participated in school life in the past, statements about whether the respondents were happy with the current participation of parents in school life and schools inviting parents to be involved in school.

At this stage, 16 codes were generated for pupils and fifteen for parents. For both parents and pupils, the largest single response code was "active" actions for parents (parents 32.1 per cent; pupils 38.5 per cent). A range of other coded responses emerged including "happy with level of involvement in school", "school invite parents to engage", "school give parents information", "school organise events to engage parents", "teachers to improve communication with parents", "examples of how parents had participated in school", "examples of how parents had supported child" and "parents do not get involved in school".

*Stage 2 coding.* At the second stage of coding, the codes generated during the first stage were reviewed to further refine and specify themes. Some were expanded and merged, while others were divided and contracted; following this process there were 11 themes drawn from the pupils' data and nine from the parents. Definitions of all themes were developed at this stage (see Table III).

*Stage 3 coding.* At the third and final stage, sub-categories were developed from the "active actions for parents" theme (see Table III). These were responses from parents and pupils that focused on specific actions expected of parents. Ten sub-categories emerged from pupils' responses and nine sub-categories came from parents' responses (Table IV).

### *Check for reliability of data coding*

The consistency of the data coding was assessed by inter-rater reliability. In total, 10 per cent each of the parents and pupils' qualitative data statements were randomly selected using a random number generator. An independent colleague was invited and given these data, and asked to determine which theme or sub-category each response falls into. The percentage of agreement between the researcher and the independent

colleague was calculated to determine the rate of agreement. The coding had an 87 per cent (pupils' data) and 85 per cent (parents' data) inter-rater reliability rate.

**Findings**

*Data presentation*

All data are presented separately for parents and pupils under two main subheadings; extent of parents' participation in school life and views on parents' participation in school.

The data on the extent of parents participation in school life are presented in percentages by gender and school type (HPS or NHPS), with differences tested by Pearson's  $\chi^2$ .

The qualitative data are summarised and illustrated by direct quotes from participants. All quotes are appended by the gender and school type of the participant. Where a term used requires explanation this is given within the quote in square parentheses.

A total of 231 pupils and 218 parents across nine schools participated, reflecting a response rate of 57.2 per cent for parents and 75.6 per cent for pupils (Table I).

**Extent of parents' participation in school life**

*Participation in school activities*

*Parents.* Less than half of parents (40.6 per cent; 37.9 per cent mothers and 44.8 per cent fathers) reported that they were "always or often" involved in school activities; while 14.3 per cent (14.0 per cent mothers and 12.1 per cent fathers) reported that they had "never" been involved in school activities (Table II). The percentage of parents who were "always or often" involved in school activities in designated HPS (41.8 per cent) was slightly higher than those in NHPS (39.9 per cent). The observed differences were not statistically significant.

*Pupils.* Similarly, less than half (43.2 per cent) of pupils reported that their parents were "always or often" involved in school activities while 18.5 per cent reported that they "never" were. Girls and those attending HPS schools reported higher levels of parental participation (Table II) but the differences were not statistically significant.

*Made to feel part of school*

*Parents.* The majority of parents (73.5 per cent) reported that they were "always or often" made to feel a part of school while only 4.7 per cent reported that they had

Demographic variable	Parents (n = 218) n (%)	Pupils (n = 231) n (%)
<i>Age/age of pupil</i>		
9	6 (2.8)	12 (5.2)
10	62 (29.1)	74 (32)
11	88 (41.3)	92 (39.8)
12	53 (24.9)	49 (21.2)
13	49 (21.2)	4 (1.7)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	59 (27.8)	124 (53.7)
Female	153 (72.2)	107 (46.3)
<i>School type</i>		
Health Promoting School (HPS)	80 (36.7)	86 (37.2)
Non-Health Promoting School (NHPS)	138 (63.3)	145 (62.8)

**Table I.**  
Demographic characteristics of respondents

out by parents and others suggested less direct actions, or actions to be carried out by schools.

*Parental participation in school; emergent themes*

*Parents.* Some parents did not directly propose actions for parents' participation in school life. Nine (7.0 per cent) reported that they were happy with the level of their participation in school (Table III) and do not want any changes. In total, 16 (12.5 per cent) suggested actions that could be taken by the school to keep parents active in school life; most of these stated that the school should keep parents informed of school events or activities by sending or giving information about school to parents through information leaflets or newsletters, some suggested that the school should invite parents to take part in school or organise events to engage parents in school and one parent that school should engage pupils.

In total, 12 (9.4 per cent) parents suggested actions that could be taken directly by teachers to improve on parents' participation in school life; they highlighted that teachers should improve communication with them. The most common response was through regular parent-teacher meetings (e.g. "2-3 times per school year"). It was mentioned that this could help create an open-door system to their child's teacher and the school.

Four (3.1 per cent) parents reported on how they had participated in school life by giving examples, which included; "been involved in activities and going to school meetings finding out how they are doing" (NHPS, Mother), "we are presently taking part in child's schooling by activities such as 'maths for fun', Parents Association, etc. This not only means we get a feel for the school, but also for our child's friends, his teacher and how the school is run" (NHPS, Mother), and "already a member of Parents' council" (NHPS, Mother).

Six parents (4.7 per cent) did not give any specific description of how they would like to be involved in child's school; they indicated things like "always" (NHPS, Father), "In a general way, if there is anything we can do to make life better, we'll be happy to take part" (NHPS, Father), "whenever needed now and then" (HPS, Mother), "in any way" (HPS, Mother) or "any active participation" (NHPS, Mother).

Theme	Shared	Pupils <i>n</i> (%)	Parents <i>n</i> (%)
Active actions for parents	✓	89 (55.6)	70 (54.7)
Happy with level of involvement in school	✓	18 (11.3)	9 (7.0)
Parents do not get involved in school	✓	16 (10.0)	9 (7.0)
School invite parents to engage	✓	7 (4.4)	16 (12.5)
Examples of how parents had participated in school	✓	7 (4.4)	4 (3.1)
Teachers to improve communication with parents		–	12 (9.4)
Examples of how parents had supported child		6 (3.7)	–
Non-specific responses	✓	4 (2.5)	6 (4.7)
Don't know	✓	5 (3.1)	1 (0.8)
Don't mind		5 (3.1)	–
Feel safe		2 (1.3)	–
Not clear	✓	1 (0.6)	1 (0.8)
Total		<i>n</i> = 160	<i>n</i> = 128

**Notes:** ✓, shared, similar views between parents and pupils; Pupils (*n* = 160) and parents (*n* = 128), number of pupils and parents who volunteered answers to the open question

**Table III.**  
Emergent themes on parental participation in school, views of pupils and parents

On the contrary, nine parents (7.0 per cent) reported that they cannot take part in school (see Table III); seven stated that due to pressure of work commitments they cannot take part in school activities; “I wish I had more time to take part in my child’s education, but my occupation does not allow this to be the case” (HPS, Father); “I would have loved to be more involved in my child’s school but the timing/I work evenings and most things are done in the evenings” (NHPS, Mother); one parent reported that she cannot take part due to work and also has a language barrier (NHPS, Mother).

*Pupils.* As with parents, some pupils did not directly suggest actions for parents’ participation in school life. Totally 18 (11.3 per cent) pupils reported that they were happy with the level of their parents’ participation in school (Table III). Seven (4.4 per cent) proposed actions that could be taken by the school to engage parents actively in school life; most of these suggested that the school could invite parents or organise events and activities to engage parents and two said they thought their school could send or give more information about the school to their parents by sending letters home with children or through telephone or text messages.

Four (2.5 per cent) pupils gave no particular description of how they would like their parents to be involved in school; they responded by reporting things like “always”, “sometimes” or “ok sometimes” but five (3.1 per cent) reported they did not mind how or when their parents take part in school, and they can take part when they like to or in any activities when they can.

Seven (4.4 per cent) pupils gave examples of how their parent(s) had participated in school life; they stated that their parents had taken part in various school activities; “My parents did the clean-up in the school; My mum made costumes for a play” (HPS, girl), “My dad took part in a shared reading programme 2 years ago” (NHPS, boy), “My parents take part in my school; My mum and dad organised a 10K walk [*charity event*] for the school” (HPS, girl). In addition, six (3.7 per cent) pupils gave examples of how their parents had supported them in school more generally, for example by talking to them about school and encouraging them to take part in sports and other activities.

On the other hand, 16 (10.0 per cent) pupils indicated that they did not want their parents to get involved in the school (two because it would embarrass them), while five (3.1 per cent) pupils stated “don’t know”. The remaining two (1.3 per cent) comments were non-specific; pupils reported that having their parents involved in school would make them feel happy and safe.

A comparison between the qualitative responses of parents and pupils revealed that they had similar views on most responses not directly suggesting active actions for parents’ participation in school. However, parents were more likely to point out the role of teachers and schools to improve parental participation in school life while pupils were more inclined to be happy with the level of parents’ participation in school, state how parents had participated in school, and report that parents do not get involved in school.

Mothers suggested more frequently than fathers that schools should invite parents to get involved in school, while fathers reported more frequently than mothers that parents did not get involved in school life. Respondents from HPS schools reported more frequently than those from NHPS schools that they were happy with the level of participation of parents in their school and less frequently that parents did not get involved in school life. Pupils from HPS schools gave relatively more examples of how parents participated in their schools than did pupils from NHPS schools.

Parents who were positive about their participation in school (i.e. those who reported that they were “always or often” made to feel part of their child’s school, encouraged to talk about things that concern their child in school or are involved in

school activities) more often provided suggestions that were categorised into schools inviting parents to get involved than did parents who were more negative about their participation. Pupils who reported that their parents “always or often” are made to feel part of their school more frequently reported that they were happy with the level of participation of their parents in the school and gave examples of how their parents participated in school life. On the other hand, pupils who reported that their parents were “never” encouraged to talk about things that concern their child in school and those who were “never” involved in school activities more frequently proposed active actions that parents could take to get involved in school life than did those pupils who were more positive about their parent’s participation.

*Suggested direct actions for parents’ participation in school*

*Parents.* Overall, 70 parents (54.7 per cent) suggested direct actions on how they would like to take part in school life. The most common action proposed was that parents would like to take part in school by being actively involved in “doing” school activities, which included “helping” with school activities or “viewing/watching” school activities; this was reported by 51.4 per cent of the 70 parents (see Table IV). Totally 14 parents (20 per cent) indicated that they would like to take part in sports/games like physical education (P.E.), ten (14 per cent) reported that they would like to take part in different school activities including baking, cake sale, book sale, arts, music and other extra-curricular activities, seven parents (10 per cent) would like to go on school tours and three (4 per cent) would like to participate in fundraising for the school and two (2.8 per cent) in concerts/fun days. Examples included: “Help out when requested by teacher at activities and sports” (HPS, Father); “Help out at busy times like concerts, fundays etc.” (NHPS, Mother); “To be allowed view more activities” (NHPS, Mother), “By helping out whenever to fund raise and promote our school in the local community” (HPS, Father), “School tours, open night” (NHPS, Mother), “More fun with sports related” (NHPS, Father), “I would like to participate in the school tours” (NHPS Mother), “Cake sale, sports day, school meetings”(NHPS, Mother).

In addition, seven parents (10 per cent) stated that they would like to get involved in school activities but did not describe any particular one (see Table IV). Five (7.1 per cent) reported that they would like to be involved in everything or anything in

Sub-category	Shared	Pupils <i>n</i> (%)	Parents <i>n</i> (%)
Parents take part by doing or joining activities	✓	35 (39.3)	36 (51.4)
Parents help with class work or learning in class	✓	11 (12.4)	9 (12.9)
Parents attend and watch activities, events or games		10 (11.2)	–
Take part in school activities – non-specific		–	7 (10)
Parents help with organising school activities		9 (10.1)	–
Parents take part in decision-making in school		–	4 (5.7)
Parents be part of school committees	✓	7 (7.9)	5 (7.1)
Parents take part in school – general	✓	4 (4.5)	5 (7.1)
Parents help children (e.g. with homework)	✓	4 (4.5)	3 (4.3)
Building relationships between parents and teachers <sup>a</sup>		4 (4.5)	–
Other	✓	3 (3.4)	6 (8.6)
Parents give support to children	✓	2 (2.2)	4 (5.7)
Total		<i>n</i> = 89	<i>n</i> = 70

**Notes:** ✓, shared, similar views between parents and pupils. <sup>a</sup>Parents to take the initiative

**Table IV.**  
Sub-categories developed from active actions for parents, views of pupils and parents

the school; for example “I would help in anyway necessary if I was needed in whatever the task may be” (NHPS, Mother).

Nine parents (12.9 per cent) indicated their interest in contributing to learning in the classroom (see Table IV). They stated that they would like to help by interacting with their child’s class through reading, maths for fun and supporting teachers when needed; “More interaction in class work and getting involved whenever possible” (NHPS, Mother); “more shared reading, maths etc. where parents come in and interact with your child is a great way of taking part in child’s school” (NHPS, Father); “helping in areas such as shared reading, sports days; supporting teachers when needed” (HPS, Mother).

Five parents (7.1 per cent) indicated that they would like to be part of the parents’ association and attend meetings; “attendance at meetings, volunteering” (NHPS, Mother); “by being part of a parents’ association” (NHPS, Mother).

Four parents (5.7 per cent) gave examples of how they can support or help their child, for example by, getting child more involved in school activities, encouraging child in school and being there for the child; three (4.3 per cent) indicated that they could help with their children’s homework; “helping him with homework and get him more involved in school activities” (NHPS, Mother); “taking an interest in homework, helping my child and others” (NHPS, Father); “always encourage my child in his school life” (NHPS, Father); “just being for him where he needs me” (HPS, Father).

Four parents (5.7 per cent) reported that they would like to be involved in the school by taking part in decision-making processes especially as it concerns curriculum formulation and financial issues (see Table IV); “being included in major decisions such as curriculum changes” (HPS, Mother); “in having a say in decisions that concern my child such as support needs and monetary issues” (HPS, Mother); “more involvement with the curriculum formulation” (HPS, Father); “monetary obligations that has no direct impact on studies” (HPS, Mother).

Other examples of how parents would like to take part in child’s school included “would like to encourage a parent/student garden” (HPS, Mother); “to come and play games with her” (NHPS, Mother); and “listening to what happens and try and solve it” (HPS, Mother).

*Pupils.* In total, 89 (55.6 per cent) pupils proposed direct ways that parents could take part in school life. Similar to parents, the most common suggestion was through participation in school activities. In total, 35 of these pupils (39.3 per cent) suggested that their parents could take part in school by doing school activities with them (see Table IV); 13 (14.6 per cent) indicated that their parents could take part by going on school tours; ten pupils (11.2 per cent) suggested that parents could take part in sports and games, 12 (13 per cent) proposed that parents could take part in activities like arts, baking, music, raffle or something fun. Nine (10.1 per cent) suggested that parents could help organise or set up school activities or events while ten pupils (11.2 per cent) said that parents could take part in school by coming to watch school activities and events or sports and matches (see Table IV); thus indicating that watching school activity was considered by pupils as taking part in school. Examples included “I would like them to be able to watch more of our activities” (HPS, girl), “I think our parents should go on our school tours with us” (HPS, girl), “If they could take part in the sports day would make me feel happy” (HPS, girl), “To do more activities, discos and play lots of sports” (HPS, boy). In addition, four pupils (4.5 per cent) did not describe how parents could take part in school but to take part in everything or some things; they suggested things like “I would like them to come in more and help out the school in general” (NHPS, girl); “be part of everything they can” (NHPS, girl); “join in some things” (NHPS, girl).

Totally 11 pupils (12.4 per cent) said that parents could take part in school by helping with school or class work; “sometimes come in and help the teachers” (NHPS, girl); “I would like my parents to help us learn in school” (NHPS, boy); “shared reading” (NHPS, boy) or “reading” (HPS, boy); “I would like my dad to teach us about lenses of glasses” (HPS, boy); “help teachers, like being an SNA [*Special Needs Assistant*]” (NHPS, boy).

Seven pupils (7.9 per cent) indicated that they would like their parents to be part of parents’ association, be on school committees or have a say in school; “I would like my parents to be part of the Parents’ Council” (NHPS, boy); “to take part in committees” (HPS, boy); “they could help by taking part in the parents’ association” (HPS, boy); “I think they should have a say in things that we do, except in sporting events” (HPS, girl).

Four pupils (4.5 per cent) suggested that parents could help them with homework while two (2.2 per cent) indicated that parents could help their children by providing support for them (see Table III); “help me” (NHPS, boy), “they can help me a bit more on homework” (NHPS, girl), “supporting me at school at any time they can” (NHPS, girl); one pupil stated “I would like my parents to be my teacher and my friend” (HPS, boy). One pupil stated “I would like them to get me off homework” (HPS, boy).

Contrary to the views of parents that teachers could improve communication with parents, pupils had a somewhat divergent opinion; four (4.5 per cent) pupils suggested that parents could get more involved in school by building relationships with teachers through more communication or mutual communication. They responded; “I would like my parents to write emails to the school” (NHPS, boy); “I would like my parents to know the teachers better” (HPS, girl); “to come in and talk to the teacher about stuff that she does not like” (NHPS, boy) and “I would like my teacher and my parents to talk a bit more” (NHPS, boy).

There were three (3.4 per cent) further suggestions on how parents could take part in child’s school. This included “by getting the Principal to make longer P.E.s [*sessions of Physical Education*]” (NHPS, girl); “to come to school very often and to come and collect me” (NHPS, boy).

Overall, there were similar opinions from both parents and pupils on direct actions for parents’ participation in school. A few divergent suggestions indicated that parents would like to take part in decision making in school while pupils were more inclined to suggest that parents could build relationships with teachers, help to organise school activities, and come and watch school activities or events.

### Discussion

Findings from this study suggest that when asked in the same way, there was broad similarity between the views of parents and pupils on parents’ participation in school life, and the various ways through which parents could participate in school life. The majority of parents and pupils from these Irish primary schools reported that parents were made to feel a part of school and were encouraged to talk about things that concern the child in school. Conversely, less than half of both parents and pupils stated that parents were always or often involved in school activities. Parents and pupils proposed more similar than diverse views regarding the best ways parents can be involved in school life. These findings illustrate a level of coherence between parents and pupils on issues related to parents’ participation in school life, and suggest that children’s opinions are relevant to matters that have to do with parents’ participation in school.

These data illustrate the willingness and readiness of parents to participate in various school activities, and reveal that pupils were also inclined to be positive about

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their parents' participation in school life; a perspective previously documented in Flanders by Vyverman and Vettenburg (2009). Many parents indicated their desire to actively participate in school tours, sports and games with their children; this was corroborated by findings from children. Pupils would like their parents to take an active part in their every day school life, including play, sports, learning, activities and events. The importance of parents giving support to their children in nurturing their confidence and the psychosocial environment within which the children spend many hours of their day was also proposed. This study revealed that a greater number of parents and pupils made more suggestions on how parents could directly become actively involved in school but fewer suggestions on how school could engage parents in school; this implies that both parents and pupils placed more emphasis on parents taking the initiative to get involved in, or connect with, the school rather than the school engaging parents.

Previous authors have highlighted the importance of parents' involvement in advancing the educational achievement and learning of children (e.g. Fan and Chen, 2001; Barnard, 2004; Lee and Bowen, 2006; Doucet, 2011). In the current study both children and parents suggested that parents could be involved in the learning process in the school, and that parents could help teachers with classroom learning or help children directly. It has been suggested that direct invitations from pupils to parents could encourage parental engagement but the implicit participation of parents in their child's learning, by volunteering to contribute to teaching or school work, may also emerge from parents' perception of children's educational need (Hoover-Dempsey *et al.*, 2005).

Both parents and pupils proposed that parents' participation in the school could include helping children with homework, or rendering educational and emotional support to children at home. These suggestion echo those proposed by Epstein in her "Framework for Parental Involvement" (e.g. Epstein, 1995, 2011). It has been argued that a substantial part of pupils' academic achievement is attributed to parental support in home learning (Harris and Goodall, 2008); this is consistent with findings that suggest that parents' involvement in education, which includes assisting child with homework is positively related to pupil academic achievement (Mattingly *et al.*, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey *et al.*, 2005; Van Voorhis, 2011). It may also be essential for descriptions of parents' involvement to comprise features of both home and school (Anderson and Minke, 2007).

As shown in this study, parent-teacher communication may be relevant to both parents and pupils to improve on parental participation in school (e.g. Epstein, 2011). There was some divergence of opinion on how communication could be improved between parents and teachers; pupils indicated that their parents should build relationship with their teachers while on the other hand parents suggested that teachers should take the initiative in reaching out to them, by improving on communicating with them. Previous studies have proposed that teachers' inviting parents to take part could contribute to increased parental involvement in school (Feuerstein, 2000; Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey *et al.*, 2005). It has also been suggested that the involvement of parents in their child's school, for example, by networking with teachers or other school staff, can be a way of parents showing support for their child in school (Sheldon, 2002). The significance of the role parents play when they communicate with their child's school has been highlighted (Feuerstein, 2000). Findings from this study also highlighted that "language" could impede parental communication and subsequently engagement in school. It has been suggested that inability to speak or write in English or poor literacy may represent a

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difficulty for parents' participation in communication activities in the school (Ingram *et al.*, 2007). Schools could mediate in cultural differences by organising language classes or events to assist parents in enhancing their language skills. Improvement in the quality and frequency of meetings between parents and teachers also emerged as a suggestion from this study.

The participation of parents in school formal operations (Byrne and Smyth, 2010) like contributing to decision making in the school (for instance, in curriculum development, or being a member of the Parents Council, which is a representative organisation for parents groups) was highlighted by some parents. However, children were more concerned with their parents being a part of the Parents' Association at their own school. This apparent disparity may be a function of pupils' poor knowledge of the formal mechanisms within schools and parents' organisations.

Although some parents and children did not give a clear definition of how they would want to actively take part in school life, their responses, for example "in everything", "generally", and "any way necessary", identified parents and pupils' willingness for parents to participate in school. Also, some parents emphasised that although they run a busy schedule, they would like to be involved in their child's school life. Although, it has been suggested that the structure of work could influence parent involvement at school (Sheldon, 2002), the findings of this study imply that parents are very willing to take part in school in various ways. This suggests that schools could identify ways in which parents, even those who are fully employed or otherwise engaged, can be involved in school directly or indirectly, or that they could make more effort to work around the work-time schedule of parents in order to efficiently maximise parental participation in school (Harris and Goodall, 2008).

Respondents from HPS gave relatively more examples of how parents had taken part in their schools than those from NHPS. They reported more frequently that they were happy with how their parents participate in school and less frequently that parents should not participate in school. These findings corroborate and emphasise the goals of the HPS, which encourages parental participation in school, and underscores the importance of positive relationships between the school and the community. This study identified that only a few of the parents who did not report positive participation in their child's school made suggestions on how parents may actively participate in school. However, many parents who reported positive participation in their child's school mentioned possible actions for parents' participation in school. It has been proposed that the extent or frequency of parents' involvement in their child's school may be influenced by their "motivational beliefs for involvement", that is, if they perceive that their contribution at their child's school would be valued and appreciated, and parents' contextual life characteristics (Hoover-Dempsey *et al.*, 2005). Taken together these both suggest that it might be useful to investigate further why parents who did not report positive participation in their child's school feel that way and to gather their views on motivational factors that could stimulate their participation in school life. On the other hand, pupils who did not report the positive participation of their parents in school more frequently suggested actions for parents' participation in school than those pupils who reported a more positive participation of parents; this may indicate that pupils could be encouraged to inspire parents' participation in school.

### **Strengths and limitations**

The study participants represented both parents and pupils of different genders and school types (i.e. HPS and NHPS, urban and rural, mixed gender and single sex

schools); this engendered a heterogeneous response to the study questions. Although there was no direct concordance between each pupil and parent participant, in each of the participating schools the parents who were invited to take part in the study were parents of pupils in the participating class groups and thus were situated within the same school and same wider community. The absolute numbers responding and the response rates achieved also add to the confidence that can be placed in the data collected.

While the overall response rates are acceptable, the valid response rate for parents may indeed be higher than 57.2 per cent as it is possible that some pupils did not give the parental questionnaire to their parents. The question arises as to whether the parents who completed and returned their questionnaires were parents who were more involved in school already or if inability to read or write created a barrier to some parents' response; the survey used for the study was in written form and self-administered. The non-responding pupils are those who were absent or for whom parental consent was not obtained, and these may disproportionately include minority groups or children living with social or health disadvantages. It is also important to note that most (72.2 per cent) of the parental respondents were mothers rather than fathers, and thus there is most likely a resulting bias in the data collected and findings reported which may well be more relevant to mothers and those interested in improving the participation of mothers in school life. Nevertheless no systematic differences between mothers and fathers were identified and that almost 30 per cent of responding parents were fathers is of note given the historic lack of paternal involvement in Irish primary schools.

The responses from this study were limited to short answers to open-ended survey (quantitative) questions; a more in-depth qualitative approach could have yielded greater understanding of the practical steps parents or schools could take to increase parents' active participation in school life. However, that would incur a substantially increased respondent burden and it would have proved very challenging to engage so many parents and pupils across a broad range of primary education settings.

### **Conclusions and implications**

This study documents that Irish parents and children have a positive view on parental participation in school, and has highlighted various instances of parents' existing and potential participation in school from the perspectives of both parents and pupils. These examples could be of practical use for schools in promoting parental participation in school life, and could prove useful to those involved in promoting health education and health promotion in schools, and most specifically to those involved in training teachers and school Principals on how to address this dimension of becoming a HPS.

These data suggest that actions are required by multiple stakeholders in order to improve parental participation; this includes educational support services, schools and parents themselves. The examples provided could inform the provision of school support systems for increased parental participation in school (like the Social, Personal and Health Education support service, which include the provision of in-service training, in school meetings or whole school seminars (SPHE Support Service, 2009). It could also be of potential use for policy interest on developing guidelines or strategies for parental participation in school.

In addition and as proposed by parents and children in this study, schools could explore more feasible partnerships with parents by encouraging actual participation of parents in every day school life including school activities and events. Parents could be

invited to support teachers in the learning process in the classroom and schools could also provide assistance to parents to improve their engagement with child's homework. All these actions for parents' participation in school have potential benefits for promoting the interactions and connections between educational stakeholders, including parents and pupils both within and outside the school environment.

The findings from this study have illustrated the broad similarity of views of parents and pupils regarding parents' participation in school life. This suggests that in contexts where it is excessively challenging to gather data from parents directly, it might be valuable to consult with children to make suggestions with regard to parents' participation in school, albeit with the proviso that there is some divergence in their views.

Possible implementation of the proposed active actions for parents' participation in school could be useful to inform interventions on parents' participation in school. Nevertheless, gaps remain in our knowledge and understanding and it would be interesting to explore the views of younger and older children on parents' participation in school, in comparison to the age group assessed in this study. Investigating parents and children's ideas on dealing with the barriers that hinder parental participation in school could also be beneficial, especially examining how best to engage with parents who have busy schedules but are willing to be involved in school life. In order to ensure the applicability of the findings presented here, it would be particularly useful to investigate whether the views presented here from parents and pupils are coherent with the views of teachers and school managements.

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## APPENDIX 2: DATA SCREENING AND CLEANING

**Table 1: Data Screening Template**

Item	Variable label in SPSS	Response options	DEFF value	Missing	Mean	SD	Coeff of variatn SD/ Mean	Median	Skew	Mean & 5% Trim Mean	Multicollinearity		Crobaach's alpha coeff	
											Tolerance	VIF		
Gender	Gender	2		0										
Age	Age	6		0	10.82	0.884	0.081	11						
Class	Class	3		0										
Father SES	Father's job	8		62_33DK 14.3% 29NR 12.6%										
Mother SES	Mother's job	8		43_18DK 7.8% 25NR 10.8%										
Happy going to school	Happy going to school everyday	4	.478	0	2.94	.816		3	-.130	√	√			
Look forward to school	Look forward going to school	4	.625	0	2.90	.881		3	-.150	√	√			
Like school	I like my school	4	1.213	1;4%	3.30	.827		4	-.899	√	√			
Part of school	Feel part of school	4	.563	2;9%	3.51	.820		4	-1.481	√	√			
Happy to be part of school	Happy to be part of school	4	.988	1;4%	3.57	.725		4	-1.563	√	√			
Student's needs important	Student needs are important	4	.195	1;4%	3.60	.722		4	-1.743	√	√			
Comfortable at school	Feel comfortable in my school	4	.284	0	3.45	.806		4	-1.311	√	√			
Safe at school	Feel safe in school	4	.195	0	3.64	.701		4	-1.960	√	√			
<b>School perceptions</b>		<b>Sum of H to S</b>										<b>.486</b>	<b>2.056</b>	<b>.834</b>
Students wear what they want	Students wear what they want to	4	3.248	0	1.54	.549		2	.471	√	√			
Students work together	Students work together	4	1.427	2;9%	2.24	1.001		2	.447	√	√			

	to plan scho activity											
Students do what they want	Students do whatever they want	4	.483	5;2.2%	1.38	.609		1	1.818	√	√	
Do activities everyone enjoys	We do activities that everyone enjoys	4	.284	3;1.3%	3.03	.820		3	-.347	√	√	
Everybody included in fun	Everybody is included in fun and games	4	.669	1;4%	3.56	.750		4	-1.511	√	√	
Students pick on other students	Students allowed to pick on other pupils	4	2.369	5;2.2%	1.12	.464		1	4.187	√	√	
Students made to do something even if they don't want to	Students made to do something if they don't want to	4	1.205	3;1.3%	2.09	1.003		2	.616	√	√	
School is fun place	School is fun place to be	4	.171	0	3.12	.899		3	-.523	√	√	
<b>Perceptions of school policy</b>		<b>Sum of H to S</b>										<b>.433    2.311    .605</b>
How often take part in activities	How often take part in activities	4	.341	1;4%				3	-.481	√	√	
Fun doing activities	Have fun doing activities	4	.872	1;4%				4	-1.381	√	√	
Spend enough time doing activities	Spend enough time doing activities	4	1.729	1;4%				3	-.040	√	√	
Students' views important inPL	Students' views are important in planning activities	4	.251	0				3	-.585	√	√	
Students allowed to take part in any school activity	Students are allowed to take part in any activity they like	4	.392	1;4%				3	-.580	√	√	
Students say if school	Students take	4	.720	3;1.3%				3	-.599	√	√	

activities good or not	part in evaluating school activities												
Enjoy doing school activities with other students	Enjoy doing school activities with other students	4	.872	0			4	-1.335	√	√			
<b>Perceptions of school activities</b>		<b>Sum of H to S</b>									<b>.429</b>	<b>2.333</b>	<b>0.604</b>
Students take part in planning school events	Students take part in planning school events	4	2.348	0			2	.336	√	√			
Students are sure about how to take part in school events	Students sure how to take part in sch events	4	1.623	7;3.0%			3	-.363	√	√			
Students are told about how important their taking part was to the success of school events	Students are told how important their part was in success of sch events	4	1.198	7;3.0%			3	-.730	√	√			
Students can stop taking part in any school event if they want to	Students are free to stop taking part in sch events	4	2.093	3;1.3%			3	-.141	√	√			
Students are told how to take part in school events	Students informed how to take part in sch events	4	2.003	1;4%			4	-1.237	√	√			
Students take action to see if school events they took part in were okay	Students evaluate sch events	4	.309	7;3.0%			3	-.116	√	√			
<b>Perceptions of school events</b>		<b>Sum of H to S</b>									<b>.442</b>	<b>2.264</b>	<b>.623</b>
Students take part in making school rules	Students take part in making school rules	4	2.078	5;2.2%			1	1.288	√	√			
Students' views listened to	Students' views listened to	4	.783	8;3.5%			3	-.173	√	√			
Students allowed to have a say in what concerns them	Students have a say in what concerns	4	.560	6;2.6%			3	-.672	√	√			

	them											
Students allowed to say how they feel	Students say how they feel	4	.609	7;3.0%				4	-1.074	√	√	
Students' views are acted on	Students views acted on	4	.218	9;3.9%				3	-.174	√	√	
Have students who speak for other students	Students councils	4	1.882	6;2.6%				2	.165	√	√	
<b>Perceptions about school rules</b>		<b>Sum of H to S</b>										<b>.656      1.524      .646</b>
My friends are important in making me feel a part of my class	Friends make me feel part of class		.872	2;9%				5	-1.743	√	√	
Students encouraged to write down their ideas	Student encouraged to write down ideas	5	.254	4;1.7%				4	-.623	√	√	
Students in my class support each other	Student in class support each other	5	1.531	3;1.3%				5	-1.517	√	√	
Students in my class help each other and this makes me feel a part of my class	Students in class help each other	5	.336	3;1.3%				5	-1.627	√	√	
Students in my class enjoy working together on projects	Students enjoy working together	5	2.914	2;9%				5	-1.689	√	√	
I like reading together with other students in my class and this makes me feel a part of my class	Like reading with other students in class	5	1.329	2;9%				4	-1.055	√	√	
In my class it is important not to leave anybody out	Important not to leave anybody out	5	.702	2;9%				5	-2.618	√	√	
Our classroom is a nice place for learning	Class nice place for learning	5	.098	2;9%				5	-1.678	√	√	
<b>Perceptions of class</b>		<b>Sum of H to S</b>										<b>.488      2.048      .806</b>
All students have the right to take part in our school	Students have right t take part	5	.336	3;1.3%				5	-1.796	√	√	
Helping students to take part has made our school more lively	Taking part made sch lively	5	.336	5;2.2%				5	-1.264	√	√	
Giving students rewards on all they do can	Giving rewards can	5	1.296	4;1.7%				5	-1.821	√	√	

encourage participation in our school	encourage taking part												
Taking part in school is fun	Taking part is fun	5	1.514	4;1.7%			4	-1.264	√	√			
Participation in school activities makes me feel healthy	Taking part is healthy	5	.963	4;1.7%			5	-1.188	√	√			
I feel happy about my level of participation in my school	Happy with level of participation	5	.385	4;1.7%			5	-1.601	√	√			
<b>Positive perceptions of school participation</b>		<b>Sum of H to S</b>									<b>.438</b>	<b>2.283</b>	<b>.772</b>
My teacher(s) make me feel a part of my school	Teachers make feel part of sch	5	.385	0			4	-1.361	√	√			
My teacher(s) make me feel comfortable	Teachers make feel comfortable	5	.336	1;4%			4	-9.24	√	√			
Our teacher(s) encourage us to say what we think in the class	Teachers encourage us to say what we think	5	.709	1;4%			4	-1.036	√	√			
Our teacher(s) are nice	Teachers are nice	5	1.573	0			4	-1.185	√				
I like my teacher(s)	Like my teachers	5	.847	0			4	-1.187	√				
<b>Perceptions about teachers</b>		<b>Sum of H to S</b>									<b>.460</b>	<b>2.172</b>	<b>.886</b>
Health	Your health	4	.610	0			3	-.836	√	√			
Feel about life	Feel about life	4	.963	0			4	-1.019	√	√			
Happy way you are	Happy with way you are	5	.805	0			4	-1.007	√	√			
Best possible life	Best possible life	10	1.447	4;1.7%			9	-1.144	√	√			
									16				
<b>Perceptions about health and wellbeing</b>		<b>Sum of H to S</b>											<b>.723</b>
Parents involved in school activities		4	1.121	4;1.4%			2	.184	√	√			
Parents made to feel a part of school		4	.356	4;1.4%			3	-.491	√	√			
Parents are encouraged to talk about things that concern me		4	1.837	5;2.2%			4	-1.268	√	√			
<b>Perceptions about Parents' participation</b>		<b>Sum of H to S</b>									<b>.728</b>	<b>2.056</b>	<b>.584</b>

## APPENDIX 3

### QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

#### **Part 1 Questionnaire concepts**

The questionnaire concepts were drawn from three broad sources:

1. Phase one data
2. Lansdown framework for children's participation
3. Other literature.

In developing the questionnaire, these three concepts overlap, that is, data from phase one reflects some of the literature and Lansdown's framework but coverage or overlap was not complete between all three. The questionnaires' concepts for the quantitative phase were mostly informed by the data from the qualitative phase. All concepts from phase one (qualitative) data that appeared in more than one schema developed by pupils were included in the questionnaire items— thus these concepts generated from the qualitative findings (phase 1 of this study) represented the primary basis of the questionnaire. Where the phase one concepts overlap with Lansdown's framework or the literature, this is shown in Table 2.

Consequently, the combination of concepts drawn from children's perspectives on school participation in the first phase was combined with some concepts from Lansdown's framework and existing literature – thus identifying some further concepts for inclusion in the survey instrument. The included concepts are itemised in Part 2 of this Appendix (3).

**Table 2 Link of concepts in questionnaire to Phase 1, Lansdown framework and Theory**

Concept	Variable	Type of question	Link to Phase 1	Language from phase one	Link to Lansdown	Language from lansdown	Link to Theory	Preexisting question from the literature
Decision making in school	Students are involved in making school rules	Factual About school	No	n/a	no	n/a	Yes (HBSC)	Yes
Decision making in school/ Programme development and design; consultative	Students' views are sought but not used as part of the decision making process	Factual About school	no	No	yes	no	yes	Yes
Decision making in school	In our school, students are allowed to contribute to decisions about what concerns them	Factual About school	no	No	no	n/a	yes	Yes
Time/Participation is child friendly	More time should be given to students to play outside	Future about school	Yes	Yes	yes	no	Yes	No
Time/Participation is child friendly	Students should be given longer breaks	Future about school	yes	Yes	yes	no	yes	No
Time	More time should be given for school activities	Future about school	yes	Yes	yes	no	yes	Yes
Liking school	I like my school	Factual About student	Yes	No	no	n/a	Yes	Yes
Going to school	Do you look forward to going to your school every day?	Factual About student	Yes	Yes	no	n/a	Yes	No
Going to school	Are you happy going to your school every day?	Factual About student	Yes	Yes	no	n/a	Yes	No
Participation is inclusive	All students have equal chance to take part in our school	Factual About school	no	No	yes	yes	Yes	Yes
Participation is inclusive	In our school, we do more things that everyone enjoys	Factual About school	yes	Yes	yes	no	no	no
Participation is inclusive	In our school, everybody is included in fun and games	Factual About school	yes	Yes	yes	no	yes	no
Participation is inclusive	In my class it is important not to leave anybody out	Factual About class	yes	Yes	yes	no	yes	no
Wearing same thing in school	Every student can use school things (let every student wear and have the same thing in school)	Future about school	yes	Yes	yes	no	yes	no
School activities	What types of activities do you do in school?	Factual About school	yes	No	no	n/a	no	no
School activities	How often do you take part in these activities?	Factual About school	yes	No	no	n/a	no	no
School activities	Do you enjoy/have fun doing these activities?	Factual About student	yes	Yes	no	n/a	no	no
School activities/Time	Are you happy with the time you have for	Factual	yes	No	no	n/a	yes	yes

	these activities?	About student						
School activities	I will like to do more activities in the school	Future about student	yes	Yes	no	n/a	yes	no
School event	A school event like a talent show every year or competitions like running or football will be fun	Future about school	yes	Yes	no	n/a	no	no
Students' views/Strategic planning; collaborative	In our school, students' views are involved in planning school activities	Factual About school	no	No	yes	yes	yes	yes
Students' views/ Strategic planning; consultative	Students' needs are considered in our school	Factual About school	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Students' views	Students in our school are encouraged to express their views	Factual About school	no	No	yes	no	Yes (HBSC; INCS)	yes
Students' views/ Programme development and design; collaborative	In our school, students' opinions are acted upon	Factual About school	no	No	yes	yes	yes	yes
Students' view	In our school, we have students' representatives who speak on behalf of other students	Factual About school	no	No	no	n/a	yes	yes
Participation is voluntary	In our school, students are allowed to participate in any school activity they are interested in	Factual About school	yes	No	yes	yes	yes	no
Participation is voluntary	In our school, students are allowed to wear what they want to school	Factual About school	yes	Yes	yes	no	yes	no
Participation is voluntary	Students can withdraw from any school event if they do not want to take part	Factual About school	yes	Yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Participation is voluntary	In our school, students are not made to do something if they don't want to do it	Factual About school	yes	Yes	yes	no	yes	no
Participation is voluntary	Students in our school are allowed to stay in if they want	Factual About school	yes	Yes	yes	no	no	no
Friendship in school	Doing school activities help me to get to play with friends and get along	Factual About student	yes	Yes	no	n/a	no	no
Friendship in school	I enjoy doing school activities with other students	Factual About student	yes	Yes	no	n/a	no	no
Friendship in class	My friends are important in making me feel a part of my class	Factual About student	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
Participation is accountable	In our school, students are involved in evaluating school activities they take part in	Factual About school	no	No	yes	yes	yes	yes
Monitoring and evaluation;	In our school, students carry out the	Factual	no	No	yes	yes	yes	yes

child-initiated, led or managed	evaluation of school events	About school							
Participating in class/Programme development and design; collaborative	Students in my class are encouraged to write down their ideas about things they are interested in doing in the school	Factual About class	no	No	yes	yes	no	no	no
Cooperation in class	Students in my class help each other and this makes me feel a part of my class	Factual About class	yes	Yes	no	n/a	no	no	no
Cooperation in class	Students in my class support each other and this makes me feel comfortable	Factual About class	yes	Yes	no	n/a	no	no	no
Team work in class	Students in my class enjoy working together on projects	Factual About class	yes	Yes	no	n/a	no	no	no
Team work in class	I like reading together with other students in my class and this makes me feel a part of my class	Factual About student	yes	Yes	no	n/a	no	no	no
Team work in school	In our school, students work together to design or plan their own programme	Factual About school	yes	No	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Class environment	Our classroom is a nice place for learning	Factual About class	yes	No	no	n/a	no	no	no
Participation is transparent and informative	Students are well informed about how to participate in school events	Factual About school	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Participation is transparent and informative	Students are confident about participating in school events	Factual About school	no	No	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Encouraging participation	Giving students rewards on all they do will encourage participation in our school	Future About school	yes	Yes	no	n/a	no	no	no
Encouraging participation/Strategic planning; collaborative	Encouraging students to be involved in organising school events will help more students to take part in school	Future About school	no	No	yes	yes	Yes (HBSC)	yes	yes
Participation in school	Students get involved in organising school events	Factual About school	no	No	yes	yes	Yes (HBSC)	yes	yes
Participation is accountable	Students are given feedback about how important their contribution was to the success of school events	Factual About school	no	No	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Teachers	In our school, students are allowed to pick their own teachers	Factual About teachers	yes	Yes	no	no	no	no	no
Teachers	My teachers make me feel a part of my school	Factual About teachers	yes	Yes	no	n/a	yes	yes	no
Teachers	My teachers make me feel comfortable	Factual About	yes	Yes	no	n/a	yes	yes	no

		teachers							
Teachers	Our teachers encourage us to express our views in the class	Factual About teachers	no	No	no	n/a	Yes (HBSC)	yes	
Teachers	Our teachers are nice	Factual About teachers	yes	Yes	no	n/a	no	no	
Teachers	I like my teacher(s)	Factual About teachers	yes	no	no	n/a	no	no	
School environment	Our school is a fun place to be	Factual About school	yes	Yes	no	n/a	yes	yes	
School environment	I feel comfortable in my school	Factual About student	yes	Yes	no	n/a	yes	yes	
School environment	I feel I am a part of this school	Factual About student	yes	Yes	no	n/a	yes	yes	
School environment	I am happy to be a part of this school	Factual About student	yes	Yes	no	n/a	yes	yes	
School environment	In my school I feel safe and supported	Factual About student	yes	Yes	no	n/a	yes	no	
School environment	Encouraging students to take part in school have made our school more lively	Factual About school	yes	No	no	n/a	yes	yes	
No bullying	In our school students are not allowed to pick on other students	Factual About school	yes	Yes	no	n/a	no	no	
No bullying	How often have you been bullied <u>at school</u> in the past couple of months?	Factual About student	yes	No	no	n/a	yes (HBSC)	no	
No bullying	How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) <u>at school</u> in the past couple of months?	Factual About student	yes	No	no	n/a	Yes (HBSC)	no	
No bullying	In the last couple of months, what did you do when you saw bullying?	Factual About student	yes	No	no	n/a	Yes (HBSC)	no	
Effect of participation/Process outcome	Taking part in my school can help me to develop self-confidence	Future About student	no	No	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Effect of participation	I feel happy about my level of participation in my school	Factual About student	no	no	yes	no	yes	yes	
Effect of participation	Taking part in school makes me have fun and enjoyment	Factual About student	no	No	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Effect of participation	Participation in school can help to improve my self-image	Future About student	no	No	yes	yes	yes	yes	

Effect of participation	Participation in school will not affect me in any way	Factual About student	no	No	yes	yes	no	no
Effect of participation	Participating in school can help to improve my performance in class	Future About student	yes	No	yes	no	yes	yes
Effect of participation	Participation in school can help me to develop good relationships in school	Future About student	yes	Yes	no	n/a	yes	no
Effect of participation	Rewarding students is a good way to encourage participation in school	Future About school	yes	Yes	no	n/a	no	no
Effect of participation	Participation in school activities make me feel healthy	Factual About student	no	No	no	n/a	Yes (HBSC)	yes
Effect of participation	Participation in school activities make me feel happy	Factual About student	no	No	no	n/a	Yes (HBSC)	yes
Parents	My parents are involved in school activities	Factual About parents	yes	Yes	no	n/a	yes	no
Parents	Parents are made to feel a part of our school	Factual About parents	yes	Yes	no	n/a	yes	yes
Parents	Parents are encouraged to discuss issues that concerns their children in our school	Factual About parents	yes	Yes	no	n/a	yes	no
Parents	Parents are encouraged to say what their hopes and expectations are and how they feel they could benefit the school	Factual About parents	yes	Yes	no	No	yes	no
Parents	Parents' opinion are taken into consideration when making decisions in this school	Factual About parents	yes	Yes	no	n/a	yes	yes

## **Part 2 Concepts included and not included in survey from phase one data collection**

The concepts of participation included in the survey questionnaire were those which appeared in more than one schema or were in the schema of more than one school.

The concepts that were not included were ideas included in just one schema by one group of students.

### **Included**

Participation is voluntary: Wear what you want; wear no uniforms to school; Don't make someone do something if they don't want to do it; Let children stay in if they want; Let children pick their own teacher<sup>2</sup>

Time: Let them have PE when they want; More time to play outside; more computer time; More time play to play in PE hall: go to the hall more; have longer play time

Participation is inclusive: All students have the equal opportunity to participate; do not leave anybody out; Do more things that everyone enjoys; let every student wear and have the same thing; Let them play in the same yard; Let everyone play <sup>2</sup>

Activities: More school activities and after school activities; school clubs; school tours/trips; More sport because if you are good at sport and not good at school work, then you will feel more welcome; sports day on every sunny day <sup>3</sup>

Participation is fun: have fun; play together; Be allowed to bring in your own toys and phones<sup>2</sup>

Bullying: no bullying; do not bully; Don't pick on someone smaller than you; stop people from getting bullied <sup>2</sup>

Friends: Introduce new people to your friends; Try to be everyone's friend even if you don't like them; You need to be kind and caring to make friends; friendship<sup>3</sup>

### **Homework: No homework; homework free days; Get homework off some days<sup>3</sup>**

Longer breaks: Let children have three lunch breaks; have longer play time <sup>2</sup>

School events: A talent show every year; have a fun fair on the last day of school; do gymnastics at school; hold small fun competitions like running or football <sup>2</sup>

Teachers: nicer teachers<sup>1, 3</sup>

Classroom: stop people from taking other people's friends away

Rewards for participation: let them be unique; give everyone rewards on all they do; tokens when you are good get your work done quick<sup>3</sup>

Shorter school time: more time on summer Easter, Christmas and mid-term breaks; no school on Friday only have school Monday, Wednesday and Friday <sup>2</sup>

School environment: new school

### **Responsibility**

Going to school

Welcome new students: I would welcome all new children and show them all the things the school has to offer; Give them a chance to know the school and people;

### **Not included**

School cafeteria; Have school orchestra; Costumes for Halloween party; have crazy hat day; eat sweets every day; bring bikes on the yard; let them have skaters; No rules: no rules out on the yard; Have assembly; Designing a school flag; get a good library with good books

### **Concepts taken from Lansdown's framework for children's participation but not in phase 1**

#### Concepts measuring the scope of children's participation

1. Strategic planning; collaborative approach: Question\_ *"In our school, students' views are involved in planning school activities"*
2. Strategic planning; consultative approach: Question\_ *"Students' needs are considered in our school"*
3. Programme development and design; collaborative approach: Question\_ *"Students in my class are encouraged to write down their ideas about things they are interested in doing in the school"*
4. Monitoring and evaluation; child-initiated, led or managed: Question\_ *"In our school, students carry out the evaluation of school events"*
5. Programme development and design; collaborative approach: Question\_ *"In our school, students' opinions are acted upon"*

#### Concepts measuring the quality of children's participation

Participation is transparent and informative: Question\_ *"Students are well informed about how to participate in school events"*

Participation is transparent and informative: Question\_ *"Students are confident about participating in school events"*

Participation is child-friendly: Question\_ *"Taking part in school makes me have fun and enjoyment"*

Participation is inclusive: Question\_ *"All students have equal chance to take part in our school"*

Participation is accountable: Question\_ *"In our school, students are involved in evaluating school activities they take part in"*

Participation is accountable: Question\_ *"Students are given feedback about how important their contribution was to the success of school events"*

#### Concepts measuring the process outcome of children's participation

Effect of participation/Process outcome: Question\_ *"Taking part in my school can help me to develop self-confidence"*

Effect of participation/Process outcome: Question\_ *"Participation in school can help to improve my self-image"*

Effect of participation/Process outcome: Question\_ *"Participation in school will not affect me in any way"*

### **Concepts from literature alone**

1. Decision-making in school\_ Students are involved in making school rules (HBSC)

2. Decision-making in school\_ In our school, students are allowed to contribute to decisions about what concerns them
3. Students' view\_ In our school, we have students' representatives who speak on behalf of other students
4. Teachers\_ Our teachers encourage us to express our views in the class
5. Effect of participation\_ Participation in school activities make me feel healthy

### **Concepts from phase1, Lansdown framework and literature**

1. Time\_ More time should be given for school activities
2. Time\_ Are you happy with the time you have for these activities?

### **Concepts from phase1and literature**

1. Liking school\_ I like my school
2. School environment\_ Our school is a fun place to be
3. School environment\_ I feel comfortable in my school
4. School environment\_ I feel I am a part of this school
5. School environment\_ I am happy to be a part of this school
6. School environment\_ In my school I feel safe and supported
7. School environment\_ Encouraging students to take part in school have made our school more lively
8. Effect of participation\_ Participation in school can help to improve my performance in class

## APPENDIX 4

### DATA COLLECTION MATERIALS

#### 1. Parents short-open questionnaire (Qualitative Phase)



##### Short questionnaire for parents

Hello. I am a PhD student with the Health Promotion Research Centre of the National University of Ireland, Galway. I appreciate the time you are giving to participate in this study. We want to find out how parents view participation in schools, and the description and definitions of participation from your point of view. Filling out the questionnaire will take a very short time. Taking part in this study is voluntary. Your name will not be needed. Your opinion is very important. There is no right or wrong answers. Thank you.

1. Gender (please tick box)

 M F

2. Age of child \_\_\_\_\_

3. How long has your child been in this school \_\_\_\_\_

4. What things or activities do you do that makes you feel a part of your child's school?

5. If there are no activities you are doing/involved in, what would you like to do that will make you feel a part of your child's school?

6. If you were asked to make sure that every parent in your child's school feels a part of the school, what would you do to make sure this happens?

Thank you for your time

## **2. Protocol for quantitative data collection**

Steps to take for the survey data collection

1. Information sheets (for students, schools, teachers and parents), consent forms (for students, parents and teachers) and letters (to school and parents) have been developed.
2. Primary schools, including schools engaged with HPS will be selected for the survey. List of eligible schools have been assessed through the HSE West Health Promotion Department.
3. In the first instance schools will be invited to take part by introductory telephone calls followed up introductory letters and information sheets sent to the schools by post. The schools will be introduced to the research and details of the research procedure will be explained to them. The schools will be assured that the researcher is ready to work with them in any way that is most convenient for them.
4. If they agree, researcher will offer to come to the schools to distribute parents' packs to students in class. But, the schools are free to take this option if they want. If they do not want to take this option, the researcher will request the schools to please state the option that is most convenient for them. We will inform them that we are pleased to work with them in any way that is most convenient and stress free.
5. A school contact person the researcher can liaise with will be requested. The contact telephone number of the contact person will be requested to make communication easier.
6. Parents' packs (with each parent pack having an information sheet, parent and child consent form, and parent one page questionnaire) will be taken to the schools or if the schools request, be posted to them. Parents will be given a week to return their consent forms and questionnaire to the class teacher. A box or a big envelope (as convenient for the class teacher) will be left in the class for the returned parents' consent forms and questionnaires.
7. Reminder letters to parents will be given to the schools to distribute to students at the middle of the week. A reminder call might be made to the school contact person in this regard.
8. The researcher will book an appointment with the school a week or two weeks after parents' consent forms have been returned to go to the schools to distribute and collect back the pupils' questionnaire. Students whose parents provide written consent and who themselves assent to take part will complete the children's questionnaire during the school day at the teachers' convenience. The researcher will be present when the questionnaires are completed by the children. However, if the school request to conduct the survey themselves with the assistance of teachers, all survey materials will be sent by post to the schools.
9. Questionnaires will be checked before leaving the class (if the researcher visits the school) or checked as soon as they are sent back by post from schools.
10. Thank you letters will be sent to all participating schools and thank you letters sent home with pupils to parents.

### 3. Introductory Letters for the survey



#### *Letter to School Principal*

Date:

Study title: Children and parents' participation in the school and how it effects the school environment

Dear Principal

I am doing my PhD with the Health Promotion Discipline of the National University of Ireland Galway. My research involves finding out how pupils and parents participate in school life. The study will involve 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils and parents being invited to complete questionnaires. The parents' information sheet, consent form and a one page questionnaire (for parents) will be sent home with the pupils. The pupils will fill in questionnaires during the school day. The pupils' questionnaire will take about 25 minutes. The information generated by pupils and parents will help to inform children, parents, guardians, teachers, principals and policy makers in Education and Health about how participation can work better in schools. The information sheet is also attached.

Thank you for participating in the study. If you have any further questions about the study, please feel free to contact my supervisor or me (0861780693).

Best regards,

Yetunde John-Akinola

PhD student; Department of Health Promotion

Health Promotion Research Centre

National University of Ireland Galway

[y.john-akinola1@nuigalway.ie](mailto:y.john-akinola1@nuigalway.ie); 0861780693

My supervisor: Dr. Saoirse Nic Gabhainn Tel: 091-493093.

E-mail: [saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie](mailto:saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie)

*Letter to Parents*

Date:

Study title: Children and parents' participation in the school and how it effects the school environment

Dear Parent

I am doing my PhD with the Discipline of Health Promotion at the National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway.

My research involves finding out how pupils and parents take part in school life. I would like to invite you and your child to fill in a questionnaire. Other children (and parents) in Primary Schools in Galway will also be filling in questionnaires. All the information you and your child give will be confidential. The information given by pupils and parents will help to inform children, parents, guardians, teachers, principals and policy makers in Education and Health about how participation can work better in schools. Ethical approval for this research has been given by the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee. The information sheet, providing you with more information, is also attached.

Thank you for participating in the study. If you have any further questions about the study, please feel free to contact my supervisor or me (0861780693).

Best regards,

Yetunde John-Akinola

PhD student; Discipline of Health Promotion

Health Promotion Research Centre

National University of Ireland Galway

[y.john-akinola1@nuigalway.ie](mailto:y.john-akinola1@nuigalway.ie); 0861780693

My supervisor: Dr. Saoirse Nic Gabhainn Tel: 091-493093.

E-mail: [saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie](mailto:saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie)



*Reminder Letter to Parents*

Date:

Re: Study title: Children and parents' participation in the school and how it effects the school environment

Dear Parent

An information sheet, consent form and one page questionnaire was sent home to you with your child some days ago.

We would appreciate it if the **consent form** with one page questionnaire could be returned to your child's class teacher before the end of the week.

Thank you for your help.

Best regards,

Yetunde John-Akinola

PhD student; Discipline of Health Promotion

Health Promotion Research Centre

National University of Ireland Galway

[y.john-akinola1@nuigalway.ie](mailto:y.john-akinola1@nuigalway.ie); 0861780693

My supervisor: Dr. Saoirse Nic Gabhainn Tel: 091-493093.

E-mail: [saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie](mailto:saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie)



*Thank You Letter to the School Principal, Teachers and Pupils*

Date:

Study title: Children and parents' participation in the school and how it effects the school environment

Dear Principal

We want to extend our sincere appreciation for the time created to distribute the questionnaires to the pupils and parents. Also, we want to extend our thanks to the pupils of the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes who completed the questionnaires and to all the teachers in these classes for their help.

The teachers did a great job in coordinating the process of the distribution of the survey materials to parents and pupils. We are very grateful for the time the pupils spent in filling in the questionnaires and for their wonderful cooperation.

It was such a delight to have worked with your school. Thank you for participating in the study.

Best regards,

Yetunde John-Akinola

PhD student; Department of Health Promotion

Health Promotion Research Centre

National University of Ireland Galway

[y.john-akinola1@nuigalway.ie](mailto:y.john-akinola1@nuigalway.ie); 0861780693

My supervisor: Dr. Saoirse Nic Gabhainn Tel: 091-493093.

E-mail: [saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie](mailto:saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie)



*Thank you letter to Teachers and Pupils*

Date:

Study title: Children and parents' participation in the school and how it effects the school environment

Dear Teacher/Pupil

We want to say thank you for the time created to take part in this study. The process of distributing the survey documents was perfectly coordinated and we are very grateful to the class teachers for all their effort.

We also want to extend our sincere appreciation to all the pupils and parents who took time to fill in our questionnaires. The pupils did a wonderful job and we were delighted with the parents' responses.

The information provided will be very useful my PhD research work.

Thank you for participating in the study.

Best regards,

Yetunde John-Akinola

PhD student; Department of Health Promotion

Health Promotion Research Centre

National University of Ireland Galway

[y.john-akinola1@nuigalway.ie](mailto:y.john-akinola1@nuigalway.ie); 0861780693

My supervisor: Dr. Saoirse Nic Gabhainn Tel: 091-493093.

E-mail: [saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie](mailto:saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie)

#### 4. Information sheets



Study title: Children and parents' participation in the school and how it effects the school environment

#### **Parent Information Sheet**

##### **Why is this study taking place?**

We want to find out how you and your child take part in school life and your experiences of taking part in your child's school.

##### **What does taking part in this study involve?**

You and your child will be asked to fill in a questionnaire. Your child will be asked to fill in a questionnaire during the school day. Other children in Primary Schools in Galway will also be filling in this questionnaire. A short questionnaire (one page) for you to fill in and a consent form have been included with this information sheet. It will take about 5 minutes. All the information you give will be confidential. Your name or your child's name is not required. We will not link you to the information your child gives, and we will not link your child to the information you give.

##### **Do I have to take part?**

Taking part in this study is totally up to you. You and your child are free to take part or not. It is your choice.

##### **What kinds of questions are asked in the study?**

You and your child will be asked questions about your child's school, school activities and how you would like to take part in your child's school. You and your child are free not to answer any question that you do not want to.

##### **What are the possible risks and benefits for me?**

There are no risks connected to taking part in this study.

##### **What happens at the end of the study?**

The information from the questionnaires will be used to write a PhD research report.

**If you have any further questions or complaints about/during the study**, please feel free to contact my supervisor: Dr. Saoirse Nic Gabhainn; Tel: 091-493093. E-mail: [saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie](mailto:saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie)



**Study title:** Children and parents' participation in the school and how it effects the school environment

## **School Information Sheet**

### **Purpose of the study**

We want to find out how pupils and parents take part in school life.

### **What does taking part in this study involve?**

Pupils, parents and teachers will be invited to fill in questionnaires. The parents' information sheet, consent form and questionnaires (for parents) will be sent home with the pupils. The teachers in the selected classes will be asked to fill in a (one page) short questionnaire. The children will fill in a questionnaire during the school day. All the information from the questionnaires will be kept confidential. We will not link any pupil, parent or teacher respondent to the information from the questionnaires. Taking part in this study is totally voluntary. Pupils, parents and teachers are free to withdraw from the study at any point.

### **What kinds of questions are asked in the study?**

Pupils, parents and teachers will be asked questions about the school, school activities and how children and parents take part in school life. Pupils, parents and teachers are free not to answer any question that they do not want to.

### **How long will the questionnaire take?**

The pupil's questionnaire will take about 25 minutes. The short questionnaire for teachers will take about 5 minutes.

### **What are the possible risks and benefits for participants?**

There are no risks connected to taking part in this study.

### **What happens at the end of the study?**

The information from the questionnaire will be used to write a PhD research report.

**If you have any further questions or complaints about/during the study**, please feel free to contact my supervisor: Dr. Saoirse Nic Gabhainn Tel: 091-493093. E-mail: [saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie](mailto:saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie)

*If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent and in confidence, you may contact the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, [ethics@nuigalway.ie](mailto:ethics@nuigalway.ie).*



Study title: Children's participation in the school and how it effects the school environment

## **Student Information Sheet**

### **Why is this study taking place?**

We want to find out how children take part in school life.

### **What does taking part involve?**

You will be asked to fill in a questionnaire during the school day. Other children in Primary Schools in Galway will also be filling in this questionnaire. We will not show or tell anyone what you write.

### **Do I have to take part?**

You are free to take part or not take part in the study. It is your choice.

### **What are the possible risks and benefits?**

Nothing bad will happen to you if you fill in the questionnaire. You will take part in a research project and might find it interesting.

### **What happens at the end of the study?**

The research will help us to learn how you and your classmates get involved in school life.

**If you have any further questions or complaints about/during the study**, please feel free to contact my supervisor: Dr. Saoirse Nic Gabhainn Tel: 091-493093. E-mail: [saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie](mailto:saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie)

*If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent and in confidence, you may contact the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, [ethics@nuigalway.ie](mailto:ethics@nuigalway.ie).*

**5. Consent forms**



Study title: Children and parents' participation in the school and how it effects the school environment

**CONSENT FORM (for parents)**

I have read the information sheet and understand everything I have read in it. I have had enough time to think about the information. I also know that taking part in the study is voluntary (it is my own choice) and I am free to withdraw from the study at any point.

Signature of parent: .....

Parent/ Guardian: Please tick ✓ box and sign

- 1. My child **DOES** have my permission to take part in the above study
- 2. My child **DOES NOT HAVE** my permission to take part in the above study

Name of child:  
.....

Signature:  
.....

Date: .....

**PLEASE RETURN THIS CONSENT FORM TO YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL TEACHER; THANK YOU.**



Study title: Children and parents' participation in the school and how it effects the school environment

**CONSENT FORM (for pupils)**

I have been told about the study and understand everything that has been said. I also know that taking part is voluntary (it is my own choice). I know that I can stop taking part if I want to.

I am willing to take part in the study.

Name of pupil: .....

## 6. Survey checklist forms and information leaflets

### Class Returns NUIG/HPRC 2012

<b>Survey Date</b>			
<b>School ID</b>			
<b>Class ID</b>			
	<b>No. Loose Qs</b>		<b>No. Filled Qs</b>
			<b>No. Blank Qs.</b>
	<b>No. of Brown Envs</b>		<b>No. Filled Qs</b>
			<b>No. Blank Qs.</b>



### Class Dispatch Form – NUIG/HPRC 2012

School ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Class ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Total no of Questionnaires: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**Sent To:** The Principal (school address)

**From:** HPRC, Aras na Coiribe, NUI Galway, Galway.

**This parcel contains:**

- **70 parents' packs (parents' consent forms/questionnaire, letters and information sheet)**
- **70 Questionnaires for pupils; 70 Information sheets & Consent forms for pupils**
- **Classroom information sheets/Forms**
- **3 envelopes for each class (Consent forms & questionnaires \_ Pupils, Parents, Teachers); 1 Freepost envelope; 8 Extra questionnaires**

ID	Class No.	No. of Parents' Packs	
1	4 <sup>th</sup> class- 25	<b>70</b>	
1	5 <sup>th</sup> class- 24		
1	6 <sup>th</sup> class- 21		
		<b>No. of Pupils' questionnaire</b>	<b>No. of Pupils' Information sheet/Consent forms</b>
		<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>
		<b>No. of Class Information sheet/Form_</b>	
		<b>1/class=3</b>	

Total no. of Packs in parcel: \_\_\_\_\_

Date sent: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_



NUI Galway  
OÉ Gaillimh



Study: Children and parents' participation in the school and how it effects the school environment

### Classroom Information Form

**Please complete this form and return it with the completed questionnaires in the FREEPOST envelope provided.**

Name of class or year: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of survey: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school: \_\_\_\_\_

Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

Number of students enrolled in class: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of students absent: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason(s) for absence, if known:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Number of students who refused (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Number whose parents refused permission (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Number of questionnaires completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you**



### ***Guidelines for teachers carrying out the survey in the classroom***

*Thank you for your help in conducting this survey. It is part of a PhD research being carried out in the Health Promotion Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway.*

*The study is looking at how pupils and parents take part in the school.*

This study is being funded by a doctoral fellowship from the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, National University of Ireland, Galway. Ethical approval has been obtained from NUI, Galway Research Ethics Committee.

*The following guidelines have been drawn up as part of a common procedure to be used by all participants in the survey. Please read them carefully before administering the questionnaire. Thank you.*

### **Conditions in classroom**

*It is important that students are not rushed, as this will affect the validity of their answers. Ideally the questionnaire should be completed in a normal classroom environment but under exam conditions, i.e. **students should not be allowed to talk or be able to see each other's answers.***

*The time it takes for students to complete the questionnaire will vary. Following pilot studies, we estimate 25 minutes for the completion of the questionnaire. It is important that students requiring less time do not disturb other students who have not yet finished and so instructions should be given to carry on with other work after completing the questionnaire. Similarly, if some pupils are not participating in the survey, they should be given something else to do.*

### **Giving help**

*The questionnaire is self-explanatory but students may still have problems completing it for one reason or another. Help should only be given if the problem is a straightforward practical one, e.g. whether to place a tick or a number in a box. If the request for help would mean interpreting a question or suggesting an answer for the student, then the student should be instructed to answer as best as he/she can or to answer the question as he/she understands it. If a student does not understand a question at all, they should enter the 'don't know' response if there is one, or write 'I don't understand' next to the question.*

### **Information on the class**

Please complete the attached classroom information form giving details of the number of students present, the number absent and the reasons for absence where known.

### **Instructions to students**

Students need to be assured of **confidentiality and anonymity**. **They should seal the questionnaires themselves in the envelopes provided once they have finished**. You may find the following text useful to read out at the beginning of the class. However you choose to explain the procedure, please stress the points in bold type.

Our school is taking part in a study about the ways that pupils take part in school life in Ireland.

You will be asked to fill in a questionnaire, mostly by ticking the box that best fits your answer. **Nobody at the school, including me, or at home will see your answers. Don't write your name on the questionnaire. When you have filled it in, put the questionnaire in the envelope and seal it.** The questionnaires will then be sent back to the researcher at NUI, Galway.

**The same questions are being asked of primary school pupils from other schools in County Galway.**

**Before you start, read the instructions on the first page carefully. Answer the questions as honestly as you can** but don't spend too much time on each question. **You should not talk to each other until everyone has finished.** Remember that it is your own opinion that is of interest and not that of anyone else. Although there will be no talking, **the questionnaire is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers.** When you have finished, please read a book or get on with your own work quietly. You can start now.

**Thank you.**

When all pupils have finished and have sealed their blank envelopes, the envelopes need to be collected and placed into the large *freepost* envelope(s), along with the classroom information forms and any unused questionnaires. These should be given back to the Principal for return to NUI, Galway.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!**



NUI Galway  
OÉ Gaillimh



Dear

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the HPRC NUI Galway survey on how pupils and parents participate in school life. Please find enclosed a parcel, which is labelled for each of the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> class groups. Each class package contain parents pack (*each pack contains: Introduction letter, Information sheet providing information about the study and consent form/One page questionnaire*) and reminder letters for parents to be given to pupils to bring home mid-week.

We would ask that you give one envelope to each child to bring home before survey day. We would also ask that you give one reminder letter to pupils to bring home mid-week.

Once the parents' consent forms/questionnaires are returned please place them in the large envelope provided, keep them in the class/office and we will collect them when we visit your school to distribute the pupils and teachers' questionnaires. We would appreciate it if you would also include any unused/unfilled parents' consent forms/questionnaires in the large envelope provided.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to call me. Once again thank you for helping us with this survey.

Yours sincerely,

Yetunde John-Akinola

PhD student; Department of Health Promotion

Health Promotion Research Centre

National University of Ireland Galway

[y.john-akinola1@nuigalway.ie](mailto:y.john-akinola1@nuigalway.ie); 0861780693

My supervisor: Dr. Saoirse Nic Gabhainn Tel: 091-493093.

E-mail: [saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie](mailto:saoirse.nicgabhainn@nuigalway.ie)



NUI Galway  
OÉ Gaillimh



### Class Returns NUIG/HPRC 2012

<b>Date</b>			
<b>School ID</b>			
<b>Class ID</b>			
	<b>No. Parents' Packs</b>		<b>No. Consent/Qs Returned</b>
			<b>No. Not Returned</b>

### Class Dispatch Form – NUIG/HPRC 2012

School ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Class ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Total no. of Parents' Packs: \_\_\_\_\_

Total no. of Parents' Reminder Letters \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

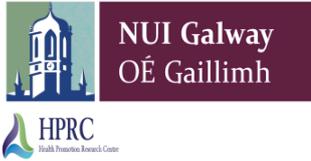


**Please Note:**

- Pupils should be given one Parent pack each (in the smaller brown envelopes) to bring home with them
- Parents are to return the ‘parents’ questionnaire’ to the class teacher
- We would appreciate if reminder can be sent to Parents through pupils mid-week for parents who have not returned their completed questionnaires
- Pupils who consent to take part in the study (by signing the pupils’ consent form) should complete the questionnaire. Each pupil should put their questionnaire in the blank envelope provided and seal
- Completed pupils’ teachers and parents’ questionnaires and signed consent forms should be placed into the freepost envelope(s), along with classroom information forms and any used questionnaires, consent forms, and information sheets.
- These should be returned to Health Promotion Research Centre NUI Galway

**THANK YOU**

## 7. Pupils' questionnaire (Quantitative)



### **Children's Participation in the school and how it effects the school environment**

#### **Introduction**

The questions in this questionnaire are about what other children in primary schools, like you, have told me. It is about how you take part (participate) in your school and how taking part in your school can help you. I would like you to answer the questions because your answers will be very useful to find out how children in primary schools take part (participate) in their schools. Other children in primary schools in Galway will also be filling in this questionnaire.

#### **Please note:**

- You do not need to put your name on the questionnaire
- Please read each question carefully before you answer and answer it as honestly as you can
- There is no right or wrong answer. What you think is very important to this research study
- You are free to take part or not take part in the study. It is your choice
- You do not have to answer any question you do not want to
- You will be asked to tick the box that best fits your answer or write on the lines

Thank you for your time.

#### ***Example:***

1. ***Is Galway in the west of Ireland?***

***Yes***

***No***

If you find it hard to tick just one answer, please select the answer that you think is **true most of the time.**

# 1. ABOUT YOU

Are you a boy or a girl?

Boy

Girl

How old are you?

9 years

10 years

11 years

12 years

13 years

14 years

What class are you in?

4<sup>th</sup> class

5<sup>th</sup> class

6<sup>th</sup> class

What are your parents' jobs?

Please describe exactly what they do, for example shop assistant, farm worker, lorry driver, dentist, teacher and so on. You can write "don't know" or "has no paid job at the moment" or "unemployed".

**My Father**.....

**My Mother**.....

## 2. ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

Here are some sentences about **your school**. Please tick a box to show how you feel about each sentence. *Please tick only one box for each sentence.*

<b>Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence</b>		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1	Are you happy going to your school every day?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Do you look forward to going to your school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	I like my school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	I feel I am a part of my school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	I am happy to be a part of this school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Students' needs are important in our school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	I feel comfortable in my school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	In our school I feel safe	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 3. MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL – SCHOOL POLICY

<b>Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence</b>		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
9	Students are allowed to wear what they want to in school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	In our school, students work together to design or plan their own school activity/school event	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	In our school, students are allowed to do whatever they want to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	In our school, we do activities that everyone enjoys	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	In our school, everybody is included in fun and games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	In our school students are allowed to pick on other students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	In our school students are made to do something even if they don't want to do it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	Our school is a fun place to be	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 4. ABOUT SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

1. What type of activities do you do in school? **Please tick ✓ all activities you do**

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sports	Arts	Music	Drama	Physical Education (PE)	School Tours	After school activities
Other (please write it down): _____						

<b>For the activities you ticked above</b>		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
2	How often do you take part in the activities above?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Do you have fun doing the activities above?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Do you feel you spend enough time doing the activities above?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Students' views are important in planning school activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	In our school, students are allowed to take part in any school activity they are interested in	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Students can say if school activities they took part in were good or not	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	I enjoy doing school activities with other students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. **ABOUT SCHOOL EVENTS** **Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence**

9	Students take part in planning school events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Students are sure about how to take part in school events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Students are told about how important their taking part was to the success of school events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Students can stop taking part in any school event if they want to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Students are told how to take part in school events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	In our school, students take action to see if school events they took part in were okay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Please show how much you agree or disagree with each of these sentences**

<b>Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence</b>		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
15	I would like to do more activities in school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	More time should be given to students to play outside	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	Students should be given longer breaks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	More time should be given for school activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	Our school should organise a fun event like a talent show or competitions like running or football every year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	Doing school activities helps me to get to play and get along with friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	Doing school activities helps me to take part in school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 6. ABOUT SCHOOL DECISIONS AND RULES

Here are some sentences about **school decisions and rules**.

Please tick a box to show how best you feel about each sentence. *Please tick only one box for each sentence.*

<b>Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence</b>		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1	Students take part in making school rules	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Students' views are listened to in our school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	In our school, students are allowed to have a say in what concerns them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Students in our school are allowed to say how they feel	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	In our school, students' views are acted on	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	In our school, we have students who speak for other students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 7. ABOUT YOUR CLASS

Here are some sentences about **your class**. Please show how much you agree or disagree with each sentence. *Please tick only one box for each sentence.*

<b>Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence</b>		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	My friends are important in making me feel a part of my class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Students in my class are encouraged to write down their ideas about things they are interested in doing in the school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Students in my class support each other and this makes me feel comfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Students in my class help each other and this makes me feel a part of my class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Students in my class enjoy working together on projects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	I like reading together with other students in my class and this makes me feel a part of my class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	In my class it is important not to leave anybody out	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Our classroom is a nice place for learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 8. ABOUT TAKING PART IN SCHOOL

Here are some sentences about **taking part in your school**. Please show how much you agree or disagree with each sentence. *Please tick only one box for each sentence.*

<b>Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence</b>		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	All students have the right to take part in our school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Helping students to take part has made our school more lively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Giving students rewards on all they do can encourage participation in our school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Taking part in school is fun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Participation in school activities makes me feel healthy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	I feel happy about my level of participation in my school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 9. MORE ABOUT HOW YOU TAKE PART IN SCHOOL

<b>Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence</b>		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
7	Taking part in my school will make me to feel good about myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Taking part in planning school events makes me feel a part of my school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Taking part in school activities make me feel happy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Taking part in school will not affect me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Taking part in school can help to do better in my schoolwork	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Taking part in school can help me have more friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Taking part in school can help me to be a more useful student	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 10. ABOUT YOUR TEACHER(S)

Here are some sentences about **your teacher(s)**. Please show how much you agree or disagree with each sentence. *Please tick only one box for each sentence.*

Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	My teacher(s) make me feel a part of my school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	My teacher(s) make me feel comfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Our teacher(s) encourage us to say what we think in the class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Our teacher(s) are nice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	I like my teacher(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# 11. ABOUT YOU, YOUR HEALTH AND HOW YOU FEEL

Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence

1. Would you say your health is.....?

Excellent       Good       Fair       Poor

2. In general how do you feel about your life at present?

I feel very happy       I feel quite happy       I don't feel very happy       I'm not happy at all

3. Thinking about the last week.....

Have you been happy with the way you are?

Never       Seldom       Quite often       Very often       Always

4. Here is a picture of a ladder:

The top of the ladder '10' is the best possible life for you and the bottom '0' is the worst possible life for you.

In general, where on the ladder do you feel you stand at the moment?

Please tick ✓ next to the number that best describes where you stand.

	10	Best possible life
	9	
	8	
	7	
	6	
	5	
	4	
	3	
	2	
	1	
	0	Worst possible life

## 12. ABOUT BULLYING

Here are some sentences **about bullying**. Please tick a box to show how best you feel about each sentence. *Please tick only one box for each sentence.*

**Please read:** We say a student is **BEING BULLIED** when another student, or a group of students, say or do nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a way he or she does not like or when he or she is deliberately left out of things. But it is **NOT BULLYING** when two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight. It is also not bullying when a student is teased in a friendly and playful way.

<b>Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence</b>		Not at all	A little	Some	A lot
1	Have you been bullied <u>at school</u> in the past couple of months?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Have you taken part in bullying another student(s) <u>at school</u> in the past couple of months?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Have you seen any bullying <u>at school</u> in the last couple of months?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Do you think bullying can stop students from taking part in school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	What did you do when you saw bullying in the past couple of months?  <i>Please write on the lines below</i>  <hr/>  <hr/>				

### 13. ABOUT YOUR PARENTS

Here are some sentences about **your parents**. Please tick one box to show how best you feel about each sentence. *Please tick one box for each sentence.*

	<b>Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence</b>	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1	My parents are involved in our school activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	My parents are made to feel a part of our school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	My parents are encouraged to talk about things that concern me in our school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	<p>Please write on the lines below how you would like your parents to take part in your school</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				

*Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire*

**8. Table 3.2: Pupils' questionnaire sub-section headings**

<b>Questionnaire section Number</b>	<b>Title of section</b>	<b>Questions (N)</b>
1	About You	3
2	About Your School	8
3	About School Policy	8
4	About School Activities	8
5	About School Events*	6
6	About School Rules	6
7	About Your Class	8
8	About Taking Part in School	6
9	More About Taking Part in School	7
10	About Your Teachers	5
11	About Your Health and How You Feel	4
12	About Bullying	5
13	About Your Parents	4

\*Section 5 on 'School Events' included some other seven questions that were not included as part of the total scores

## 9. Parents' questionnaire (Quantitative)



### Parents' participation in the school and how it effects the school environment

#### PARENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

##### Introduction

The purpose of this PhD research is to find out **how parents take part in their children's schools**. Your answers will be very useful to find out what parents think about taking part in their children's school life. You do not need to put your name on the questionnaire

##### 1. ABOUT YOU

1. Gender (please tick box)    Male    Female
2. Age of child \_\_\_\_\_
3. How long has your child been in this school \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick ✓ one box for each sentence		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1	I am involved in school activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	I am made to feel a part of my child's school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	I am encouraged to talk about things that concern my child in the school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Please write on the line below the best way you think you would like to take part in your child's school _____				

*Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire*

## APPENDIX 5: SUPPLEMENTARY DATA FOR ARTICLE 1 - VIEWS OF PUPILS ON SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

### A. SCHEMA PRESENTATION FROM PUPILS

Figure 1: Schema of school I (Question 1)

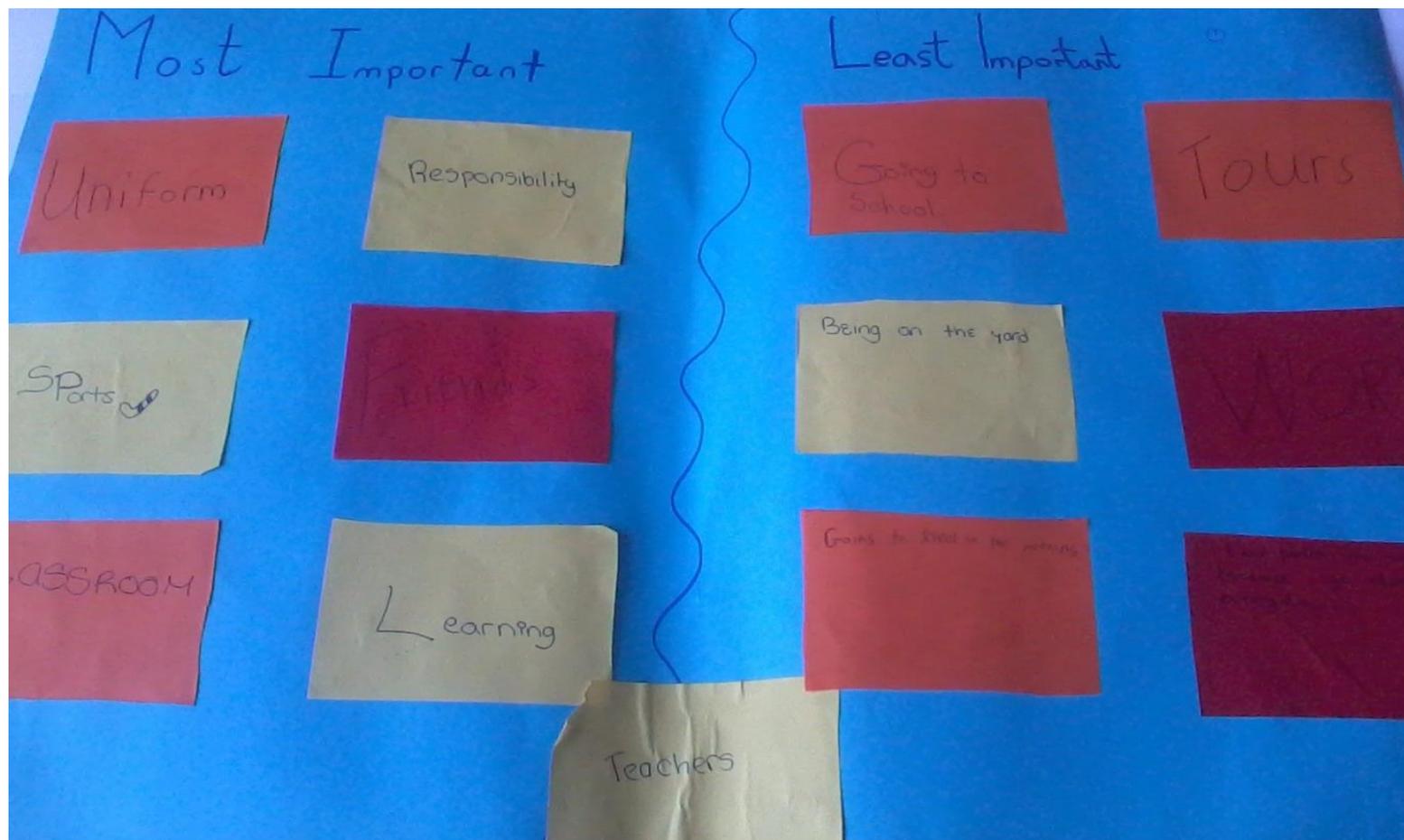


Figure 2: Schema of school II (Question 1)

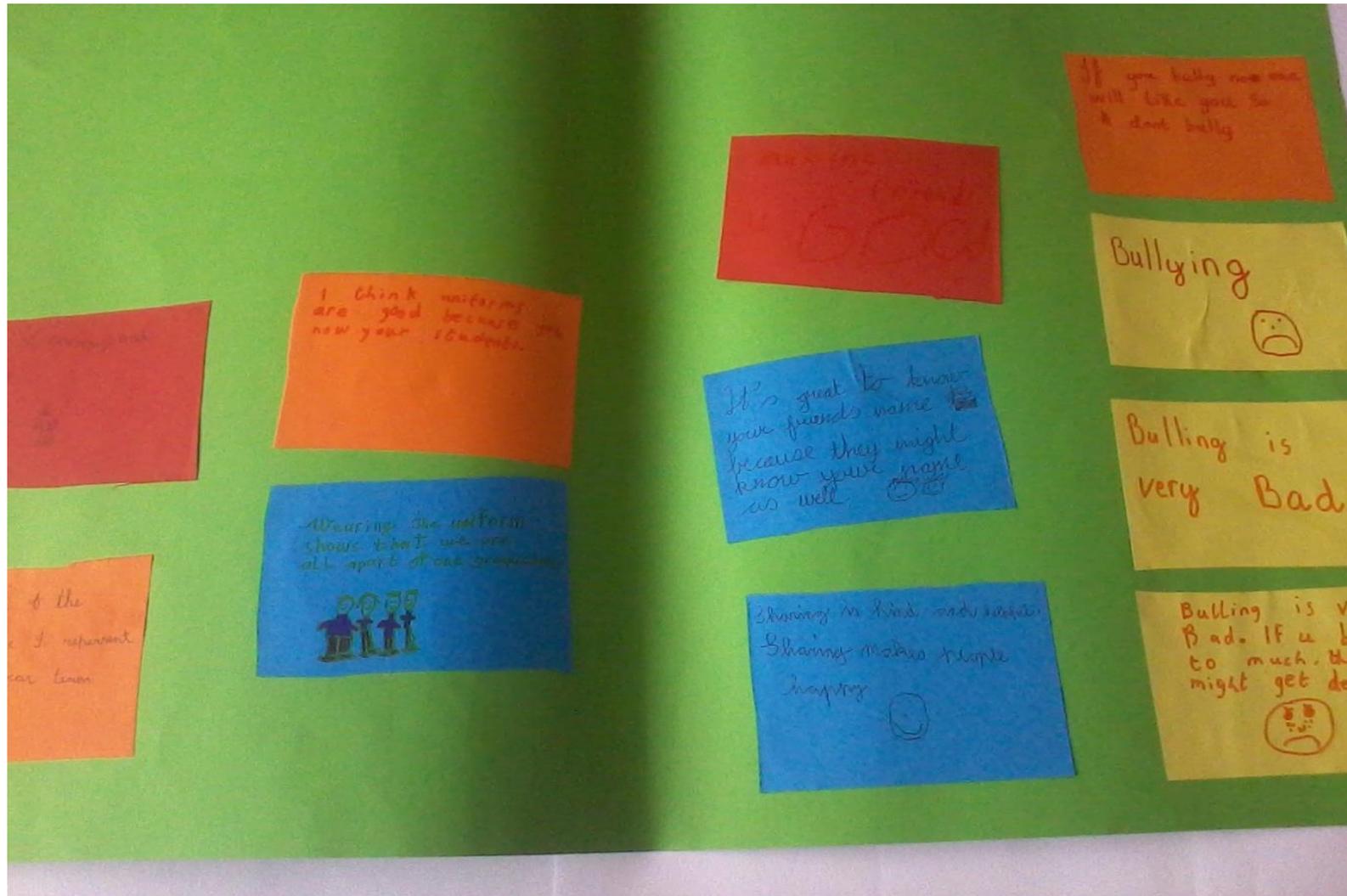


Figure 3: Schema of school III (Question 1)



Figure 4: Schema of school III (Question 1)



Figure 5: Schema of school I (Question 2)

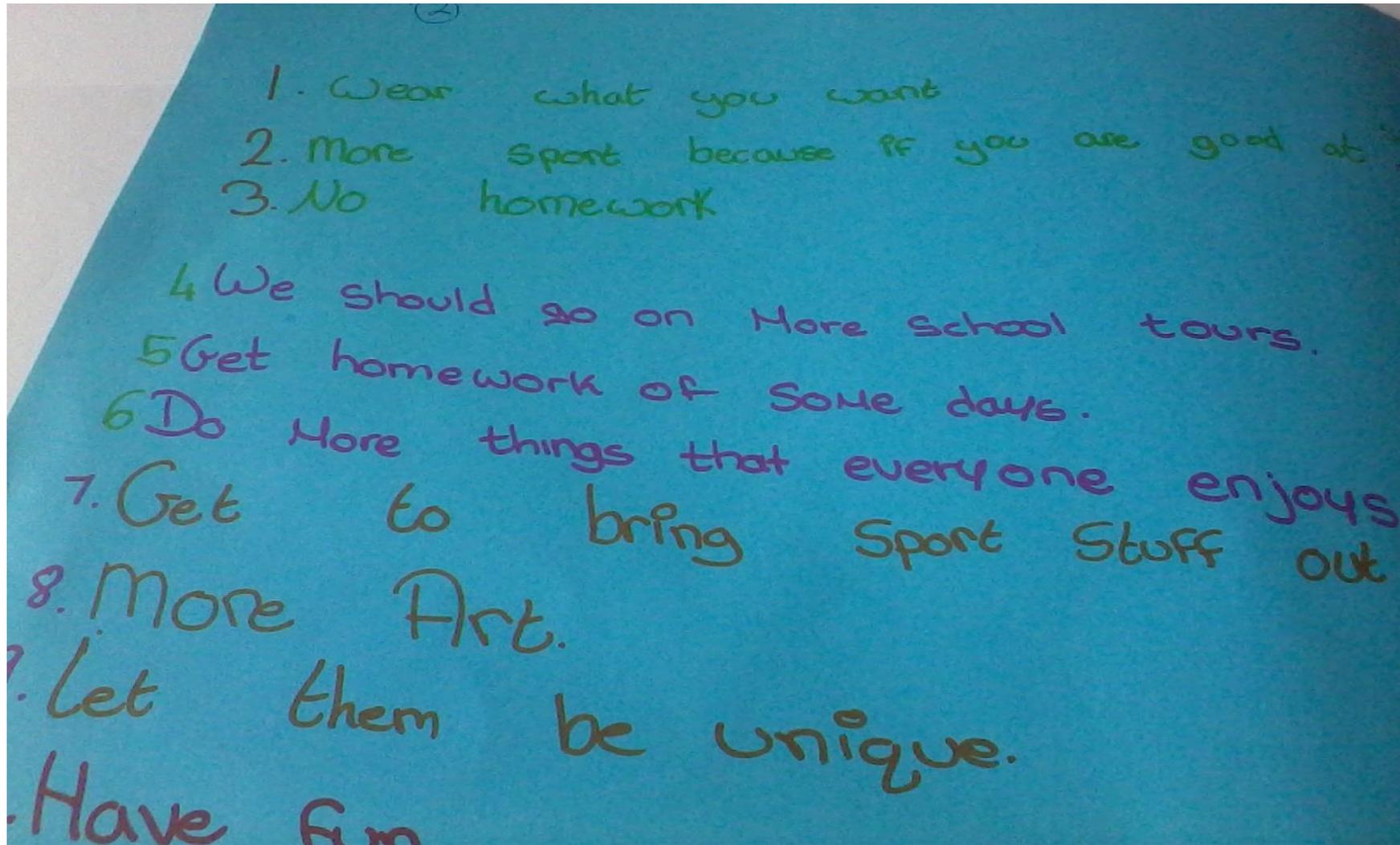


Figure 6: Schema of school I (Question 2)

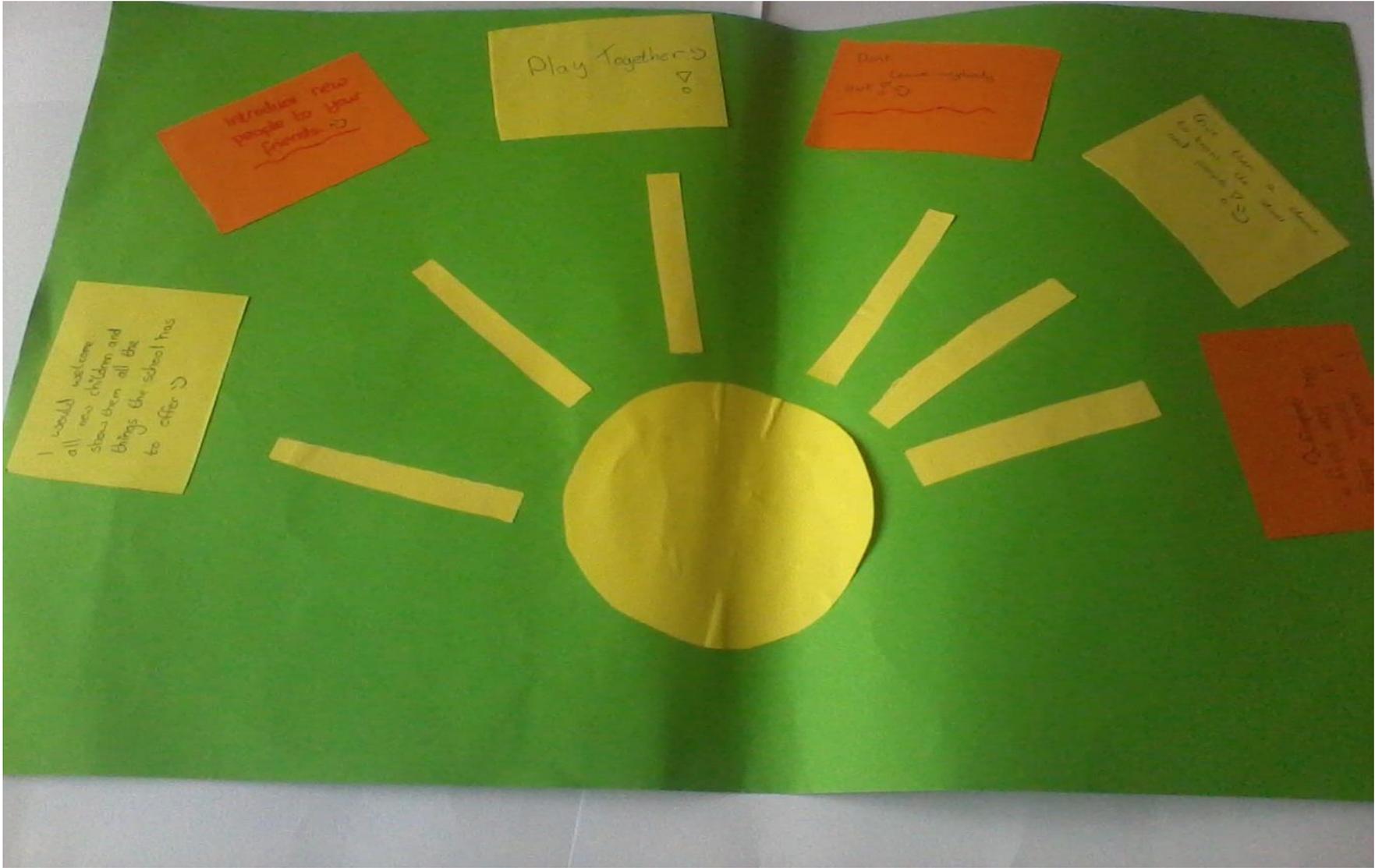


Figure 7: Schema of school II (Question 2)

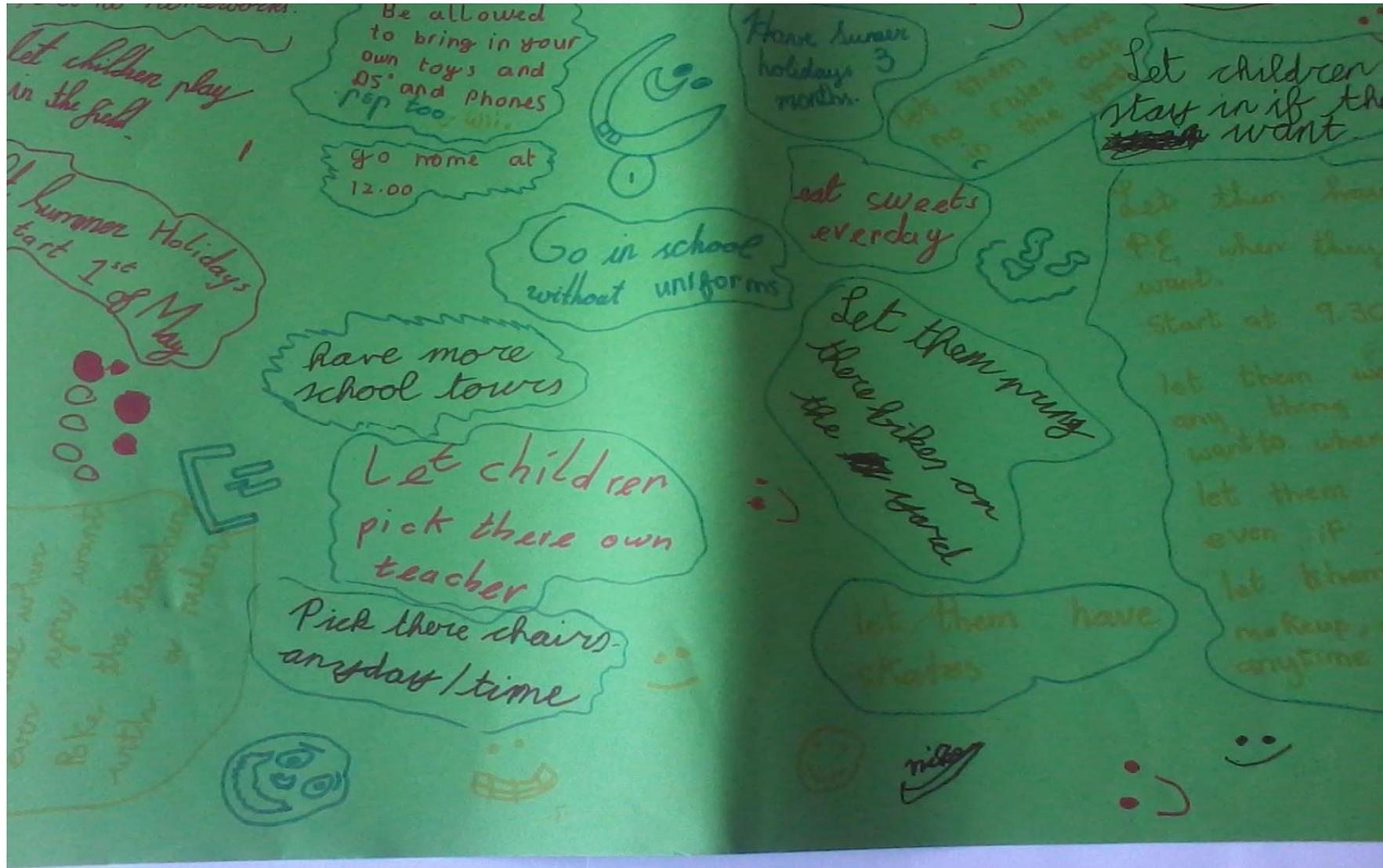


Figure 8: Schema of school II (Question 2)







**B. TABLE SHOWING PUPILS' CATEGORY TITLES – Qualitative Phase**

**Table 3 SCHOOL 1- Q1- What makes you feel a part of the school?**

Categories/Titles + Ideas	
Most important	Least important
<p><b>Uniform</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wearing uniform Monday to Friday every week</li> <li>Emblem of the school</li> <li>Uniform (8x)</li> <li>My school uniform</li> <li>Wearing a uniform (2x)</li> <li>Wearing the school uniform makes me part of the school</li> <li>The school uniform makes me feel part of the school (2x)</li> <li>I feel part of the school when I put on my uniform</li> <li>Because I wear uniform</li> </ul> <p><b>Responsibility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being given responsibility to deliver notes to different classes</li> <li>Coming to school everyday</li> </ul> <p><b>Sports</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being involved in school activities</li> <li>Being part of the football team (2x)</li> <li>When I play sports</li> <li>School teams (hurling, Gaelic, etc.)</li> <li>Being part of Gaelic team/hurling</li> <li>Being part of the Gaelic team</li> <li>When we do team games like soccer</li> <li>I feel part of the school because I take part in sports</li> <li>Taking part in sports, activities and games</li> <li>Sports in school</li> <li>Sports</li> <li>When we go outside to play</li> <li>Representing the school in sports</li> <li>Doing sports</li> <li>Sport teams</li> <li>Taking part in after school activities (2x)</li> <li>Being part of a sports group</li> <li>Part of the school basketball team</li> <li>Being part of a team at school/school team (5x)</li> <li>Taking part in school activities (2x)</li> </ul> <p><b>Friends</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having a lot of friends/Having friends (7x)</li> <li>Meeting all of the friends each day</li> <li>When I get to see my friends</li> </ul>	<p><b>Going to school</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Going to school in the morning</li> <li>Going to school everyday</li> </ul> <p><b>Tours</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Go on trips to represent the school in sports</li> <li>School tours/Going on school tours</li> <li>Going on trips/Going on school trips</li> <li>Going on school trips all together</li> <li>Coming to school 5 days a week</li> </ul> <p><b>Being on the yard</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Playing together</li> </ul> <p><b>Work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The work/Work (3x)</li> <li>Doing and bringing homework into school</li> <li>I feel part of the school when we work together</li> <li>Learning new things</li> </ul>

<p>My friends/Friends (4x)  Recognised in school  Friends and clubs  Fun  Doing stuff together  Talking with my friends and classmates  We all sit with friends and others  Having friends in school  People make you happy  Having good friends  Having fun with your friends everyday  Coming into school and seeing our friends  Having friends that you meet everyday</p> <p>Classroom  Being in a class  In a building  The atmosphere here  Learning together  Classmates (2x)  Being with friends</p> <p>Learning  Its learning new things everyday  Learning different things  Learning new things</p>	
<p>*Teachers were considered important but were not placed in the most or least important categories  Good teachers (2x)  I feel part of the school because all the teachers and pupils and the Principal are nice to me  Having a teacher  The Principal knowing my name  Teachers</p>	

**Table 4 SCHOOL 1- Q2- If it was your job to make sure everybody in your school felt a part of the school, what would you do?**

Categories/Titles + Ideas	
First group	Second group
<p>No homework  No homework  Homework off some days</p> <p>Sport  Do lots of team or class activities or games  Would let the children on yard play sport  Sports day every year  Have special events where everyone in the school takes part  Sports for everyone  Have everyone do a social activity such as drama, soccer etc</p> <p>Spare time  Go on more school tours  Shorter school  Give them spare time to get to know people more</p>	<p>Safety  Stop bullies  Let everyone take part in the playground games</p> <p>Nice  Introduce them to all your friends (if you're a child) and teachers  Play with them on yard  Would make sure everybody is nice  Be nice to everybody  Leave nobody out  Talk to them  I would be nice to everyone  Playing together  Having friends  Be their friend</p> <p>Really random</p>

<p>Shorter school time Have time to talk to friends, get to know more about them</p> <p>Games Games to include everyone More drama More things everyone enjoys</p> <p>Organised Would put 10 ideas on a sheet and let people vote which one was the best If somebody was being rejected, I would introduce them to new people Carry out surveys to see if everyone is okay Organise things Have meetings regularly with everyone Have a survey and go around asking what do they like to do and put it onto the list of activities I would make sure everybody takes part in what they can Get everyone involved in something I would ask everyone in the school what they like to do as a pastime and make a few clubs that everyone in the school can do Let there be votes for activities or to the yard or classrooms (children voting)</p> <p>Free expression Let them be unique Wear what you want Keep in contact with everyone and stop discrimination against other backgrounds Help others Free expression</p> <p>No uniform No uniform (x4) Make them wear the same clothes and shoes (vans)</p> <p>Classrooms More friendly classrooms I would welcome them to it Let everyone who wanted to go to sports matches for the school Ask how they feel Be nice</p>	<p>Ask them what would make them feel part of the school Enlist a big brother big sister programme Let everyone who wanted to go to sports matches for the school Ask how they feel Be nice Call people on jobs Give them all uniforms Refurbish the PE hall Let everyone meet and greet each other in their class Older people to help younger people Give them all a school jacket</p> <p>Welcoming people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would make everyone come together to say “hi” and meet each other</li> <li>• I would help the kids who have problems with work so they can fit in with others</li> <li>• I would welcome all the new children to the school and show them all the things that the school offers</li> <li>• Make a club so kids can help each other with homework, chat and have fun after school</li> </ul> <p>Activities pile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would arrange a school related activity like litter picking or gardening</li> <li>• I would let everyone participate in everything so they won’t feel left out</li> <li>• Propose new ideas for playing together</li> <li>• Organise art groups to draw, paint and so on, so that everyone learns to work together/Organise group activities so everyone can learn to play together</li> <li>• Have lots of activities that would suit everyone</li> <li>• Introducing new sports to the school; my point being that some kids might not like the sports we already have</li> <li>• Try to make them play a sport for the school</li> <li>• Let them take part in games</li> <li>• Open up more sports/clubs so children can make friends</li> <li>• Make clubs of all types like sports</li> </ul>
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	<p style="text-align: right;">and other ones</p> <p>Introducing pile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn everybody's name (2ce)</li> <li>• Give them a chance to know the school and people</li> <li>• I would greet everybody morning at the front door</li> </ul>
<p><b>Schema of titles (First group)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wear what you want</li> <li>• More sport because if you are good at sport and not good at school work then you'll feel more welcome</li> <li>• No homework</li> <li>• We should do on more school tours</li> <li>• Get homework off some days</li> <li>• Do more things that everyone enjoys</li> <li>• Get to bring sport stuff out on yard</li> <li>• More art</li> <li>• Let them be unique</li> <li>• Have fun</li> </ul>	<p><b>Schema of titles (Second group)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would welcome all new children and show them all the things the school has to offer</li> <li>• Introduce new people to your friends</li> <li>• Play together</li> <li>• Don't leave anybody out</li> <li>• Give them a chance to know the school</li> <li>• I would arrange a school activity like litter picking or gardening</li> </ul>

**Table 5 SCHOOL 2- Q1- What makes you feel a part of the school?**

Categories/Titles + Ideas	
First group	Second group
<p>Playing with my friends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Playing with friends</li> <li>Your friends</li> <li>Playing at lunch time</li> <li>Having lunch with my friends</li> <li>Friends</li> <li>Good times</li> <li>Being together and having fun</li> <li>Having fun/Hanging out</li> </ul> <p>The work/Doing subjects in class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The teachers try and try until we understand what is being taught</li> <li>Doing subjects with my class</li> <li>The things you do like Maths and English</li> <li>The teachers are very nice and kind</li> <li>The education</li> <li>Doing work</li> <li>Doing fun subjects with our teachers</li> <li>Amount of homework</li> <li>Education makes me feel part of this school</li> <li>Having smart board in the class changes everything</li> <li>Smart board</li> <li>The work</li> <li>There is loads of education</li> <li>The subjects</li> <li>When we hang up our art on the wall</li> <li>Knowing that everybody else is learning too</li> <li>I think when we do Irish it makes me feel part of this school because most schools aren't Irish</li> <li>You will get education</li> </ul> <p>Doing drama</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doing plays</li> </ul> <p>Getting up early</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early morning</li> </ul> <p>Sport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doing PE</li> <li>Playing sports for the school</li> <li>I think Irish dance makes me feel part of this school</li> <li>The emphasis on sport which makes this school feel like one big team</li> </ul> <p>Art</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doing art with class</li> <li>We do art every Friday and we are able to have a giggle</li> <li>I like doing art</li> <li>One pupil drew an animal to represent art</li> </ul> <p>Uniform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having a uniform</li> <li>I like how we don't have uniform      No uniform</li> </ul> <p>Individual (not categorised)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having fun</li> <li>• Because I am in the school</li> <li>• Doing music</li> <li>• You get to meet new teachers and learn about them and how long you have been here</li> <li>• The fact that everything that is done is to help the school and students</li> </ul>	<p>School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School building</li> <li>When we represent our school in drama</li> <li>Taking part in plays</li> <li>Memories made in the school</li> <li>Music</li> </ul> <p>Friends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading with the younger classes</li> <li>I think the fun and games make me feel part of this school</li> <li>My friends</li> <li>Playing with my friends and games with friends</li> <li>Friends 3ce</li> <li>My friends</li> <li>Learning and helping other people</li> <li>I feel part of this school because my friends and teachers always make me feel welcome</li> <li>I think when we go to the hall and come together and do stuff together; it makes us feel we are part of our school</li> <li>At school my friends always help me when I am down</li> <li>Jumping and telling tales around the school</li> <li>Being with friends</li> </ul> <p>Acceptance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I feel honoured to be here</li> <li>Taking part</li> <li>Everybody is nice; most of the time anyways</li> <li>Playing football with my friends</li> <li>Friends make me feel part of the school</li> <li>My friends make me feel welcome when I come in the door</li> <li>Seeing all the other people at school</li> <li>Playing with friends all day</li> </ul> <p>Sports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Playing games</li> <li>PE 5ce</li> <li>Sports day makes me feel were one big school</li> <li>After school activities</li> <li>Wearing the jersey while at matches</li> <li>We have a lot of fun and games 2ce</li> </ul> <p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My teacher is very kind to me and helps me with lots of things</li> <li>The teachers are nice</li> <li>The teacher helps you and are nice and kind</li> </ul> <p>Individual (not categorised)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That you have stuff to do and entertaining</li> </ul>

**Note:** some category titles were added at the schema development stage

**Table 6 SCHOOL 2- Q2- If it was your job to make sure every student/person in your school felt a part of the school, what would you do?**

Categories/Titles + Ideas	
First group	Second group
<p>Give everyone an award for being in the school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dont hit anything!!</li> <li>• Dont be angry</li> <li>• I'd give everyone a big hug</li> <li>• Make everyone feel special</li> <li>• Treating everybody equally</li> <li>• Making jobs for everyone</li> <li>• Maybe give them a certificate to say they are part of the school</li> <li>• Ask them to pick own activity</li> <li>• I would listen to everyone's problems and try to solve them; I'll make a pencil case for every student with the school crest</li> <li>• Talking and sitting next to them all the time</li> <li>• Make sure everybody was learning</li> <li>• Make sure they are enjoying themselves</li> <li>• No favouritism</li> <li>• No homework</li> </ul> <p>Individual ideas/not categorised</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would go around the school and see what makes them feel part of the school</li> <li>• I would ask everyone to give an idea on how to improve the school and I would listen and consider each one</li> <li>• Help them with their work/You can get a better education</li> <li>• Welcome them to the school/I would let them pick who they want to sit beside</li> <li>• I would ask every pupil to tell them what their name is/Tell everybody's name that is in the class to the new person</li> <li>• I would do a ----- and put everyone's name in the newspaper telling people how great these children are</li> <li>• No punishments for a month!!!</li> <li>• Give them uniforms</li> </ul> <p>Designs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'll have a uniform with the school crest and colours</li> <li>• I would have a big feast outside and put their names on the seats with the school crest on it</li> <li>• Maybe a competition to design a school crest/or flag</li> </ul> <p>More outdoor toys and games</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'd hold more sports day or something similar</li> <li>• I would give each child a special job to do</li> <li>• More after school activities so people could make more friends</li> <li>• I would form a football club for after school for girls and boys</li> <li>• Have more play time outside</li> <li>• Longer lunch break</li> </ul> <p>School tours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School tour to the louvre museum</li> <li>• A school tour to Paris for the whole school</li> </ul> <p>Class pet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get a free pet</li> <li>• Free ice cream</li> </ul> <p>Rejected ones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robotic teachers</li> <li>• Don't have a cow</li> </ul>	<p>Make people feel better</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sympathy from the teachers</li> <li>• Encourage them</li> <li>• Making them feel better if they feel or somebody feels bad</li> <li>• Make everyone feel better</li> <li>• Give everyone a school jersey</li> <li>• The class was having a debate about uniforms and if we wear them we will honour our school and be part of it</li> <li>• I would give them a yes or no to have uniforms</li> <li>• I would play games</li> <li>• I would make a t-shirt for everyone in the school saying "I am part of this school" or "I am part of Gael Scoil Dara"</li> <li>• Be very (13ce) nice!!</li> <li>• Treat everyone equally</li> </ul> <p>Do more school activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The plays we do</li> <li>• Have a free open day once a year with-free candy floss; Soccer tournament; Cake sale; Fortune teller</li> <li>• I would ask the principal if we could have an art class from 5pm to 6pm</li> <li>• Let them play sports for the school in competitions</li> <li>• By entering dramas and things like that together</li> </ul> <p>Individual ideas/not categorised</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obedience</li> <li>• Don't give 100 lines</li> <li>• Privacy when wanted</li> <li>• Do more sport!!</li> <li>• I would not give ant homework</li> <li>• By going to school</li> <li>• Less maths</li> <li>• Longer lunch time!!!</li> </ul>

**Note:** some category titles were added at the schema development stage

**Table 7 SCHOOL 3- Q1- What makes you feel a part of the school?**

Categories/Titles + Ideas	
First group	Second group
<p>Break</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More time to eat and play</li> <li>• Break makes me feel like part of the school (2ce)</li> </ul> <p>Oldest class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discipline helps me to be part of this school</li> <li>• We mind the infants at break time</li> <li>• We are the oldest class</li> <li>• Standing out from different classes because we are sixth class</li> <li>• Helping the younger ones in the yard</li> <li>• The responsibility 6<sup>th</sup> class get</li> </ul> <p>School work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When we are learning Irish, English and maths. I know that my intelligence is expanding. So I think I am doing the kind of job coming to school; my friend and education</li> <li>• It makes me feel part of the school when I make my work successful</li> <li>• When I complete my homework successfully</li> </ul> <p>Uniform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When I wear my uniform/ Wearing the uniform (5ce)</li> <li>• The individual blue hoodies for each child in 6<sup>th</sup> class</li> <li>• When you have your own uniform</li> <li>• School crest on the jumper</li> </ul> <p>Bullying</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bulling is futile in this school</li> <li>• Bullying is bad</li> </ul> <p>Individual ideas/not categorised</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel like I am part of the school when everyone appreciates my talents</li> <li>• Concerts that we participate in outside school</li> <li>• After school activities</li> <li>• Break time</li> <li>• Going on a tour</li> </ul> <p>Friends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I like messing around with my friends</li> <li>• My friends (3ce)</li> <li>• Going with friends</li> <li>• The people you know</li> <li>• The teachers know my name</li> <li>• All of our class get on well together</li> </ul> <p>Sport teams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I like playing in the hall because that is the best sport of all</li> <li>• When we are playing hurling or gaelic (2ce)</li> <li>• Representing the school in sport teams/Taking part in sports for the school</li> <li>• Playing basketball because I can proudly represent the school (2ce)/ Being part of the school basketball team (2ce)</li> <li>• I train with the school gaelic team</li> <li>• When my class and I do PE together</li> <li>• When I score a goal in hurling</li> <li>• Sports is great; It is fun</li> </ul>	<p>School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The interactive board helps with studying</li> <li>• The visualise helps with</li> </ul> <p>Hoodies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have our own school jumpers</li> <li>• The crest on my uniform jumper</li> <li>• My uniform makes me part of this school (2ce)</li> <li>• Our new/unique hoodies/our 6<sup>th</sup> class hoodies/the blue hoodies we got</li> </ul> <p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers help with hard work</li> <li>• Doing jobs for teachers or any staff in the school/We help the principal and teachers</li> <li>• The teachers make me a part of my school</li> </ul> <p>Sport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By taking part in camioige and other activities/We all play camoige together as a team</li> <li>• When I wear the school jersey</li> <li>• Hurling, Gaelic, Soccer activities</li> <li>• My participation in the school sports/When I get involved in sports (2ce)/School teams/Playing sports for the school (2ce)/After school sports</li> <li>• We represent the school in sports</li> <li>• Soccer at break</li> </ul> <p>Recycling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We collect the compost</li> <li>• We have done a lot of recycling for the green flag</li> <li>• We collect the landfill and recycling</li> </ul> <p>Friends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think friends make me feel a part of this school</li> <li>• All of our class get on well together</li> <li>• Going on a tour</li> </ul> <p>Choir</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Singing for the choir in school (2ce)</li> <li>• Doing a new music concert in leisure land</li> <li>• Doing things together out of school/Doing something as a group</li> <li>• When I get asked to do stuff and plays</li> </ul>

**Table 8 SCHOOL 3- Q2- If it was your job to make sure every student/person in your school felt a part of the school, what would you do?**

Categories/Titles + Ideas	
First group	Second group
<p><b>Sport</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I would open a pitch for every person to play sport in</li> <li>More sport for younger classes; I think it would make me feel more involved</li> <li>Have a soccer, gaelic, hurling, tennis, track (running), basket-ball and teams quiz</li> <li>I would let all sports be played at break time</li> <li>Organise a big sport game</li> </ul> <p><b>Play and yard</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let all the children play in the same yard</li> <li>I think I would make one big yard</li> <li>A pitch where everybody could play together at break; I think would make me feel more involved</li> </ul> <p><b>Own clothes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let everyone wear whatever they want</li> <li>I would let each pupil wear their own clothes</li> </ul> <p><b>Talent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I would let them show of their talent to the school</li> <li>Have a talent show</li> </ul> <p><b>Friendship and talking/friends</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make sure that there is no groups in a class and that everybody can be friends; boys and girls mixed together/Make sure that everyone is friends with everyone/Make sure everyone has a friend/Everyone to get along</li> <li>Make sure they participate in activities, sports and singing</li> <li>Make sure everyone is nice to each other and stop all bullying</li> <li>Make sure they have fun and never let them be left out</li> <li>Have a lesson on how to converse with another pupil or child</li> <li>Involve younger classes with older classes more; I think it would make people feel more involved/Let 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> &amp; 4<sup>th</sup> class play together so all of them feel equal</li> <li>I would let every child meet up in the morning and talk to each other</li> <li>I would make sure every nation of children get along together</li> <li>Make sure they participate in activities/I would make sure they help out in art activities</li> <li>Everyone treated the same</li> </ul> <p><b>Express themselves</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See if they had any ideas to make them feel like they are a part of the school</li> <li>Have each child express themselves</li> </ul> <p><b>Tours</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I big school tour (3ce)/I big day out</li> <li>I would let each pupil wear their own clothes</li> </ul> <p><b>Jobs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I would give everybody a job (5ce)/Have a day that we try out jobs</li> <li>Let them work on the white boards like teachers</li> <li>Give 6<sup>th</sup> class opportunity to mind infants at lunchtime</li> <li>I would let them do fun jobs if they chose</li> </ul>	<p><b>Jobs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I would give them all jobs</li> <li>To help teachers do jobs</li> </ul> <p><b>School subjects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow to go to the PE hall, library and computer room</li> <li>Use PE hall when raining</li> <li>Go to computer room more</li> <li>More reading time</li> <li>Use library/Go to library at break if we want to</li> <li>No homework</li> <li>More time for PE (2ce)</li> <li>More history lesson</li> <li>Longer first break</li> </ul> <p><b>Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have a school soccer team</li> <li>More sports days/Get everyone involved in sport/Fund a sport for everyone/Organise more sports team/Encourage team; sports</li> <li>Have a pitch</li> <li>I would let the children do what they want for an hour every week</li> <li>PE/Teamwork</li> <li>I would give a go at their favourite hobby and hopefully they would accomplish a trophy or even for fun</li> <li>I would let them do activities free at their own will/More activities</li> <li>Gather everyone together and hold a fun day/Have fun activities for everyone to participate in</li> </ul> <p><b>Cafeteria</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have a school cafeteria (3ce)</li> </ul> <p><b>School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No bullying</li> <li>Have a schedule for switching seats</li> <li>No teachers' pets!</li> <li>Host assembly</li> <li>Put a counsellor in the school</li> <li>Organise a big fair where everyone is included</li> <li>I would make everyone to wear the school uniform/Make each class uniform</li> <li>A big friend programme where one 6<sup>th</sup> class showed all first senior and junior infant around the school</li> <li>Allow more treats for lunch</li> </ul> <p><b>Competition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have a competition</li> <li>One big game</li> <li>Start up more clubs</li> <li>Make sure everybody is member of a team</li> </ul> <p><b>Bullying</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No more bullying</li> <li>I would make sure everyone was feeling good</li> <li>I would tell everybody they should accomplish their goal in life</li> <li>Talk to every child in turn and ask how</li> </ul>

<p>they wanted to do it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would do classes after school like cooking, art, craft and design, drama classes, more tours during the year</li> </ul> <p>Activities for school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More trips and walk</li> <li>• More school tours</li> <li>• Play different things outside in the football pitch other than soccer</li> <li>• More school activities</li> <li>• No dancing lessons</li> </ul> <p>Homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a homework club after school</li> <li>• Less or no homework so children could have more time outside</li> </ul> <p>Break</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different classes are not allowed to play soccer against each other outside at break</li> <li>• More/Longer time to eat your lunch</li> <li>• More time for break (2ce)/More time outside</li> <li>• Mix the yards for all classes (2ce)</li> <li>• Make cafeteria for everybody to eat together</li> <li>• More play time</li> </ul> <p>Names</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would give out new football and hurling jerseys with the crest and their names on the back</li> <li>• I would put name on all their jumpers</li> </ul> <p>Individual/uncategorised ones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change sits quite often</li> <li>• Make the teachers not strict</li> <li>• A big book fair</li> <li>• Make sure that everybody wears uniform everyday</li> <li>• No more punishments</li> <li>• Have a school assembly</li> <li>• Let them volunteer in drama</li> <li>• I would help them with anything</li> <li>• I would make sure they help in fundraising</li> </ul> <p>Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure rubbish is put in right bins</li> <li>• Make sure they help the environment</li> <li>• Help out in recycling</li> </ul> <p>Eating</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A place where everybody could eat together; I think would make people feel more involved</li> <li>• I would build a cafeteria at my school</li> </ul> <p>Pictures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would put up a picture of everyone and write a little bit about them, then stick it on the wall where we can see it/Would show a picture of everyone where people can see it</li> <li>• To help teachers do jobs</li> </ul>	<p>they feel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counsellor</li> </ul> <p>Hoodies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone to have different colour hoodies, not just 6<sup>th</sup> class (3ce)</li> </ul> <p>Don't make them dance if they don't want to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't have to go to dancing if you don't want to (2ce)</li> <li>• Stop making parents pay for dancing</li> <li>• No Irish dancing</li> </ul> <p>Peers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop boys thinking they are better than girls</li> <li>• Let 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> mind classes!! Not only juniors and seniors</li> <li>• Make sure everyone has friends</li> </ul> <p>Sports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow to play hurling at break</li> <li>• Basketball for boys</li> <li>• Soccer training after school</li> <li>• Let girls do gaelic</li> <li>• Football pitch for every class</li> <li>• Have a different variety of sports for the people so they can represent the school/Have a big activity with all different sports</li> <li>• Tag Rugby</li> <li>• Football team/soccer team</li> <li>• Better PE time and day</li> <li>• Make them part of a school team of their choice</li> <li>• Change everything</li> </ul>
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## APPENDIX 6

**Table 9: PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOL PARTICIPATION - PHASE 1**

<b>Q1- What makes you feel a part of your child's school?</b>	<b>Q2- If it was your job to make sure every student/person in your school felt a part of the school, what would you do?</b>
<p>School activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend and are involved in school activities like school sport days, Christmas shows, school plays, school-church services, barbeques, walks, parades and school shows, the school play and sports day</li> <li>• Help with fundraising events and other school events</li> </ul> <p>Talk to her teacher or principal/Teachers are nice; you can talk to them about anything</p> <p>Attend parents-teachers association meeting</p> <p>Make voluntary contribution to the school</p> <p>Help with child's homework and reading; Talk to child about school</p> <p>Get to know their friends</p> <p>Don't know</p> <p>International day where you talk about your culture</p> <p>Bring child to school and collect after school</p> <p>Nothing</p> <p>Not much</p>	<p>Get parents involved in more school activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• like sports, school end of year show; activity day in the school for everyone to attend; involve and participate in any and all parts of children education; have more school activities where all parents can meet and take part; healthy eating; exercise registration</li> </ul> <p>Ask parents what their hopes and expectations are (Encourage parents to talk about how they feel)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask parents how they feel they could benefit the school; look for parents' field of interest; make sure all are welcome</li> </ul> <p>Have a notebook where all parents can write down their ideas and children concerns; get every parent to discuss issues; have a parent committee and get ideas from all parents; parent mornings; Learning about other families' nationality in the school</p> <p>Regular parent meetings/have monthly meetings for parents and teachers to discuss involvement</p> <p>Parent teacher association</p> <p>Don't know; not sure; nothing</p> <p>Launch event or activities where both parents and children are involved</p> <p>Have annual meetings about school curriculum and other changes that are to take place within the school</p> <p>Listen more to children</p> <p>A parent and child day where parents would go in and see what their child does everyday</p> <p>I don't have time because of my job</p> <p>Spend more time with kids doing homework</p>

## APPENDIX 7: SUPPLEMENTARY DATA FOR ARTICLE 4

### Stages of coding to show emergent themes on parents' participation in school

**Table 10: New codes generated for pupils' and parents' string variables**

<b>1a PUPILS</b>				
Respondents	Variable label	Codes	N	%
	School invite Parents	0	3	1.3
	<b>Active actions for Parents</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>38.1</b>
	Don't want them to	4	16	6.9
	Happy with level of involvement	5	19	8.2
	Don't mind what they do	8	2	0.9
	When they like to	81	3	1.3
	Don't know	88	5	2.2
	No response	99	71	30.7
	Feel safe	111	2	0.9
	Non-specific description of participation	112	4	1.7
	How Parents had participated	113	7	3.0
	School give Parents information	555	2	0.9
	School organize events to engage Parents	666	2	0.9
	Not clear	777	1	0.4
	How Parents had supported child	888	4	1.7
	Feelings	999	2	0.9
<b>Total</b>		<b>N=16 codes</b>	<b>231</b>	
<b>1b PARENTS</b>				
Respondents	Variable label	Codes	N	%
	School invite Parents	0	1	0.5
	<b>Active actions for Parents</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>32.1</b>
	Nothing	4	1	0.5
	Happy with level of involvement	5	9	4.1
	Don't know	88	1	0.5
	No response	99	90	41.3
	Non-specific description of participation	112	6	2.8
	How Parents had participated	113	4	1.8
	Open door system	223	2	0.9
	School engage pupil	224	1	0.5
	More communication with teacher PTM	225	10	4.6
	No time; Busy	230	8	3.7
	School give Parents information	555	11	5.0
	School organize events to engage Parents	666	3	1.4
	Not clear	777	1	0.5
<b>Total</b>		<b>N=15 codes</b>	<b>218</b>	

**Table 11: Merged codes generated for pupils' and parents' string variables**

2a PUPILS				
Respondents	Variable label	Code (Column 'Q')	N	%
	School invite Parents	0	3	1.3
	School organize events to engage Parents	666	2	0.9
	Don't mind what they do	8	2	0.9
	When they like to	81	3	1.3
	Non-specific description of participation	112	4	1.7
	How Parents had supported child	888	4	1.7
	Feelings	999	2	0.9
	School give Parents information	555	2	0.9
	Don't want them to	4	16	6.9
	Don't know	88	5	2.2
	Not clear	777	1	0.4
	Happy with level of involvement	5	19	8.2
	How Parents had participated	113	7	3.0
<b>Table 4 show categories</b>	<b>Active actions for Parents</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>38.1</b>
	Feel safe	111	2	0.9
	No response	99	71	30.7
<b>Total</b>		<b>N=13</b>	<b>231</b>	
2b PARENTS				
Respondents	Variable label	Code (Column 'S')	N	%
	School invite Parents	0	1	0.5
	School organize events to engage Parents	666	3	1.4
	Non-specific description of participation	112	6	2.8
	School give Parents information	555	11	5.0
	Nothing	4	1	0.5
	No time; Busy	230	8	3.7
	Not clear	777	1	0.5
	Happy with level of involvement	5	9	4.1
	How Parents had participated	113	4	1.8
	Open door system	223	2	0.9
	More communication with teacher PTM	225	10	4.6
<b>Table 4 show categories</b>	<b>Active actions for Parents</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>32.1</b>
	Don't know	88	1	0.5
	No response	99	90	41.3
	School engage pupil	224	1	0.5
<b>Total</b>		<b>N=12</b>	<b>218</b>	

**Table 12 Emergent themes on parental participation in school, views of pupils and parents**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Shared</b>	<b>Pupils n (%)</b>	<b>Parents n (%)</b>
Active actions for parents	✓	89 (55.6)	70 (54.7)
Happy with level of involvement in school	✓	18 (11.3)	9 (7.0)
Parents do not get involved in school	✓	16 (10.0)	9 (7.0)
School invite parents to engage	✓	7 (4.4)	16 (12.5)
Examples of how parents had participated in school	✓	7 (4.4)	4 (3.1)
Teachers to improve communication with parents		-	12 (9.4)
Examples of how parents had supported child		6 (3.7)	-
Non-specific responses	✓	4 (2.5)	6 (4.7)
Don't know	✓	5 (3.1)	1 (0.8)
Don't mind		5 (3.1)	-
Feel safe		2 (1.3)	-
Not clear	✓	1 (0.6)	1 (0.8)
<i>Total</i>		<i>n=160</i>	<i>n=128</i>

**Notes:** 'Shared' means similar views between parents and pupils; Pupils (n=160) and Parents (n=128) means number of pupils and parents who volunteered answers to the open question

## APPENDIX 8

### CODEBOOK: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Section	Questions	Variable name	Variable label	VA	Value label	Comments
		ID1	Location	1	Rural	Noted
			Education	2	Urban	
		ID2	School Type	1	HPS	
				2	NHPS	
		ID3	School number	1-8		On the cover
		ID4	Student number	#		????
<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	MY1	Gender	1	Boy	
				2	Girl	
	2	MY2	Age	9-14		
	3	MY3	Class	1	4th class	Q
				2	5th class	Q
				3	6th class	Q
	4	MY4	Father job	TX	Enter text	
	5	MY5	Mother job	TX	Enter text	
				88	Don't know	
				99	Missing answer	
<b>2</b>	<b>1-8</b>	SCM1	School happy going	1	Never	
		SCM2	School look forward			
		SCM3	School like	2	Sometimes	
		SCM4	School feel part			
		SCM5	School happy part of	3	Often	
		SCM6	School student needs			
		SCM7	School feel comfortably	4	Always	
		SCM8	School feel safe			
<b>3</b>	<b>9-16</b>	SCG9	School wear anything	1	Never	
		SCG10	School work together			
		SCG11	School do what you want	2	Sometimes	
		SCG12	School act all enjoy			
		SCG13	School included in fun	3	Often	
		SCG14	School pick on students			
		SCG15	School made to do something	4	Always	
		SCG16	School is fun			
<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	ACT1	Types	1	Sports	
				2	Arts	
				3	Music	
				4	Drama	
				5	PE	
				6	School tours	
				7	After school	
				8		
4	2-8	ACT2	Activities often	1	Never	
		ACT3	Activities fun			
		ACT4	Activities enough time	2	Sometimes	
		ACT5	Activities student view			
		ACT6	Activities take part	3	Often	
		ACT7	Activities evaluation			
		ACT8	Activities enjoy	4	Always	
<b>5</b>	<b>9-14</b>	EV9	Events take part	1	Never	
		EV10	Events sure	2	Sometimes	
		EV11	Events success	3	Often	
		EV12	Events stop			
		EV13	Events information	4	Always	
		EV14	Events evaluation			
5	15-21	EA15	Activities do more	1	Strongly disagree	
		EA16	More time play		Disagree	
		EA17	Longer breaks	2	Neither A/D	
		EA18	Activities more time			
		EA19	Events fun	3	Agree	

		EA20 EA21	Activities & friends Activities & taking part	4 5	Strongly agree	
6	1-6	SR1 SR2 SR3 SR4 SR5 SR6	School rules Students' views Students have a say Student say how feel Student views act on Student councils	1 2 3 4	Never Sometimes Often Always	
7	1-8	CL1 CL2 CL3 CL4 CL5 CL6 CL7 CL8	Class friends Class ideas Class support Class help Class work together Class reading Class included all Class nice place	1 2 3 4 5	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither A/D Agree Strongly agree	
8&9	1-13	TP1 TP2 TP3 TP4 TP5 TP6 TP7 TP8 TP9 TP10 TP11 TP12 TP13	Part. student right Part. school lively Part. student rewards Part. sch. Fun Part. healthy Part. level happy Part. feel good Part. sch. Events Part. sch. Activities Part. affect me Part. sch. Work Part. more friends Part. more useful	1 2 3 4 5	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither A/D Agree Strongly agree	
10	1-5	TE1 TE2 TE3 TE4 TE5	Teachers make feel part Teachers make comfortable Teachers encourage Teachers nice Teachers like	1 2 3 4 5	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither A/D Agree Strongly agree	
11	1	HE1	Your health	1 2 3 4	Poor Fair Good Excellent	
	2	HE2	Feel about life	1 2 3 4	Not happy at all Not very happy Quite happy Very happy	
	3	HE3	Happy way you are	1 2 3 4 5	Never Seldom Quite often Very often Always	
	4	HE4	Position on ladder	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Worst life          Best life	
12	1-4	BL1 BL2 BL3 BL4	Bullying at school Bully take part Bullying seen Bullying stop part.	1 2 3 4	A lot Some A little Not at all	
12	5	BL5	Bullying do	TX	Write text	
13	1-3	PA PA2 PA3	Parents school activity Parents feel part Parents encouraged	1 2 3 4	Never Sometimes Often Always	
	4	PA4	Parents take part	TX	Write text	

## APPENDIX 9

### STEPS TAKEN TO CONSTRUCT AND CHECK SCALES' RELIABILITY

For the first scale created (school perception), which had eight items, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (CAC) was .834; this was considered acceptable.

The internal consistency of the second scale (school policy perception) with initial eight items after four negatively worded items had been reversed was .541. One item (Q2\_11 'In our school, students are allowed to do whatever they want to do recoded') was removed because the 'CAC value if item deleted' (.598) was far above the CAC value; the internal consistency of the scale increased to .605. A second item (Q2\_9 'Students are allowed to wear what they want to in school recoded') was also removed because the 'CAC value if item deleted' (.626) was far above the CAC value; the CAC of the final scale (6 items) increase to .626 and this was considered suitable.

The internal consistency of the third scale - seven items (perception of school activities) was .604; the fourth - six item scale (perception of school events) was .623; the fifth - seven item scale (possible outcomes of school activities) was .620; sixth-6 item scale (perception of school rules) was .646; the seventh - eight item scale (perception of class) was .806; the eighth-6 item scale (perception of taking part in school) was .772. The CAC for these scales were considered acceptable.

One item (Q9\_10 'Taking part in school will not affect me') was removed from the ninth scale - seven items (outcomes of taking part in school); this reduced the scale to six items but increased the CAC from .679 to .785.

The internal consistency of the tenth scale - four items (perception of teacher) was .886.

One of the items (Q11\_4 'Best possible life') for the eleventh scale - four items (perceptions of health and wellbeing), which consisted of 1-10 response options was recoded into 1-5 options; this increase the CAC from .655 to .723.

One item (Q12\_4 'Do you think bullying can stop students from taking part in school') was removed from the twelfth scale - three items (perceptions of bullying in school) because the 'CAC value if item deleted' (.558) was far above the CAC value of .424; the CAC of the scale increase to .559 and this was considered suitable.

The thirteenth scale - three items (perceptions of parents' participation in school) CAC was .584; this value was also considered acceptable

Table 1 in Appendix 2 shows the CAC of scales.

**APPENDIX 10**

**ADDITIONAL SUPPLEMENTARY METHODOLOGY DATA**

		Health and wellbeing score	Teacher score	School policy perception score	School activities score	School events score	School rules score	Class score	Positive perception of school participation	Parents participation score	School perception score recorded
Pearson Correlation	Health and wellbeing score	1.000	.432	.398	.388	.389	.362	.290	.415	.366	.411
	Teacher score	.432	1.000	.517	.509	.385	.427	.609	.618	.413	.583
	School policy perception score	.398	.517	1.000	.604	.594	.423	.513	.558	.368	.617
	School activities score	.388	.509	.604	1.000	.649	.489	.529	.549	.354	.526
	School events score	.389	.385	.594	.649	1.000	.449	.412	.548	.420	.360
	School rules score	.362	.427	.423	.489	.449	1.000	.473	.446	.358	.368
	Class score	.290	.609	.513	.529	.412	.473	1.000	.609	.387	.504
	Positive perception of school participation score	.415	.618	.558	.549	.548	.446	.609	1.000	.389	.547
	Parents participation score	.366	.413	.368	.354	.420	.358	.387	.389	1.000	.309
	School perception score	.411	.583	.617	.526	.360	.368	.504	.547	.309	1.000

## APPENDIX 11

### DISSEMINATION OF STUDY FINDINGS

#### 2013

- John-Akinola, Y.O. & Nic Gabhainn, S. (2013) Children's participation in health promoting schools: children's views and extent of participation (Oral presentation) *4<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Health Promoting Schools Odense*
- John-Akinola, Y.O. & Nic Gabhainn, S. (2013) Assessing parental involvement in schools: the similarity of views of parents and children (Oral presentation) *4<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Health Promoting Schools Odense*
- John-Akinola, Y.O., Gavin, A., O'Higgins, S. & Nic Gabhainn, S. (2013) Developing students research competence: Using the participatory research process (PRP) to explore students (Poster presentation-acknowledgement-Mr. Jakub Gajewski) *European Child Health Conference DCU Dublin*

#### 2012

- John-Akinola, Y.O., Gavin, A., O'Higgins, S. & Nic Gabhainn, S. (2012) Promoting child wellbeing through school participation: views of children (Poster presentation) *Wellbeing Conference NUI Galway*
- John-Akinola, Y.O., Gavin, A., O'Higgins, S. & Nic Gabhainn, S. (2012) Promoting child wellbeing through school participation: views of children (Oral presentation) *European Conference on Educational Research – the need for educational research to champion freedom, education and development for all Cadiz*
- John-Akinola, Y.O., Gavin, A., O'Higgins, S. & Nic Gabhainn, S. (2012) Developing students' competence through school participation-views of children (Poster presentation) *16<sup>th</sup> Annual Health Promotion Conference – Embracing New Agendas for Health Promotion Action: developing workforce competencies for effective practice NUI Galway*

#### 2011

- John-Akinola, Y.O., Gavin, A. & Nic Gabhainn, S. (2011) Taking part in school life: views of children (Poster presentation) *15<sup>th</sup> Annual Health Promotion Conference – Mainstreaming Health Promotion: Promoting Health Across Sectors NUI Galway*

#### 2010

- John-Akinola, Y.O. & Nic Gabhainn, S. (2010) A mixed method approach to participation in health promoting schools: socio-ecological perspectives on the involvement of parents and children (Oral presentation) *1<sup>st</sup> Schools for Health in Europe (SHE) Summer School Denmark*

