What is the Public Understanding of Investment in Education, particularly Early Education?

Beth Fagan

Masters of Business Administration

National College of Ireland

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Contents

Beth Fagan

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis was to find out what the public think about investment in education, particularly early education.

The literature, particularly newer research by both Allen (2011, 2012) and Heckman (2008), make the economic case for investment in early education, particularly for those who are born into difficult circumstances. Some of the earlier literature focusses on the difficulties encountered by those who lack sufficient words to express their feelings and the subsequent problems that causes them later in life (Webster-Stanton and Taylor 2001, Conway and Brown, 2004), with early school leaving and problems with abuse of alcohol and drugs.

Children not finishing schools was addressed in the earliest piece of research examined (Kelly, Verdman, and McGuire, 1964) and was a point taken up much later by Levenstein (l970). The problems children were having finishing school could be linked back to being unprepared when they entered the school system at age 5.

The educational system in Ireland appears to be in a state of flux with many Government initiatives and task forces looking into various aspects of the educational system. The Department of Social Protection has sent an unfortunate message by encouraging those who lack employment skills to work with the youngest children in various childcare settings.

Twenty five people were interviewed and their opinions sought. While close to 50% (N=12) of those interviewed understand and supported programmes for young children, most did not understand how early those programmes should begin. Only one person mentioned that good quality programmes offer cost savings.

The open ended nature of the questions meant that other issues were brought up by those interviewed with teacher training being the most often mentioned (N=9), with a series of suggestions on improving it.

The public understand the importance of early education, but not the economic argument.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

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(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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Introduction

The Debate about Education in Ireland

The debate about education in Ireland is confusing not due to a lack of information but perhaps due to too much information from many sources including the media, TV, radio and announcements and decisions from many government departments – particularly Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. What is clear when we look at the prison population (IPRT, 2013) is that something is not working, but to understand how the public feel about investment in education is more complex.

The conversations around education range from discussions about how to pay for the second free preschool year, to whether the government should continue to fund free third level education. There appears to be some confusion amongst the general population as to where the biggest return on investment in education may lie.

There are, of course, the competing agendas of the various bodies - government departments, the unions, parents, as well as all those involved in education at different levels. This has helped add to the sense of confusion about what is happening and what should happen in education in Ireland. And the picture of the overall health of education in Ireland is far from clear – we have almost 45% of the population graduating with degrees (Industrial Development Authority (IDA) - Ireland, 2013) while we have 25% of the population functionally illiterate (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, (OECD) 2009).

This aim of this thesis will be to examine the case for establishing early education programmes, with the potential benefits for children's success in the educational system, as there appears to be a lack of understanding of the huge savings that could be made if good quality early education was universally available. This thesis will also try and ascertain the causes of the resistance to investment in early education.

The objectives will be to:

- Conduct a review of the literature to ascertain if there is a theme that runs through the literature regarding early education programmes;
- to examine the impact of early education on positive life chances;
- conduct research to see where the public believe investment in education is best placed;
- to examine the resistance to implementing early education programmes
- to devise a plan to address the findings.

This thesis will attempt to examine the public's understanding of where investment in education is best placed, but cannot be viewed as a comprehensive review of all difficulties faced, particularly in the current difficult economic times. The number of topics and initiatives being attempted by both Government Departments and semi state bodies makes the debate about education in Ireland cluttered. There are many competing agendas so making a case for early childhood programmes is difficult, and it is hard to work out where the government's priorities are in terms of implementation. It is also difficult to see if the Government has an overall plan for education or just has a series of initiatives, review groups, plans without taking a more holistic view of what education should look like for the knowledge economy. Educational initiatives coming from government departments will be looked at first, and when the Workforce Development Plan is looked at in conjunction with the Community Employment Scheme there is some reason to doubt that an comprehensive plan is in place.

Government Departments:

The Department of Education and Skills published a 'Workforce Development Plan' for early childhood care and education in 2010, which outlined the importance of appropriate qualification for practioners dealing with the youngest children. In the conclusion to the Workforce Development Plan it is stated that its main objective was to 'ensure that all staff engaged in the provision of early childhood care and education… are appropriately qualified for their role' It was also stated in that report that the issues facing the workforce in Early Education and Care were a microcosm of the challenges that the entire educational sector must address in training people with the skills necessary for immediate and long term future needs of all those involved in education. Yet an original aim of the Workforce Development Plan was to have all those involved in the care and education of young children, at Fetac Level 5 by 2013 has been diluted with the requirement that only those centres and services who wish to partake in the free pre-school year need to have their lead staff at that level (Early Childhood Ireland, 2012).

The Department of Education is reviewing the Junior Certificate, and has just announced the formation of a Review Group to look at developing a modern form of apprenticeship to meet the needs for a 'skilled workforce' needed for the changing economy (Department of Education and Skills 2013).

Meanwhile the Department of Children has announced the formation of the Family Support Agency, and has established a task force to help form the new agency. The report on the establishment and remit of the new agency was published in July 2012 and Department is currently recruiting members for the Board (Fitzgerald, 2013). The Department of Children introduced a free pre-school year in 2012 and discussions are underway to extend that to a second year (Early Childhood Development and Care, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012).

The cost of the free pre-school year per child per annum is €2,850 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2010).

The community employment (CE) scheme is designed to help long term unemployed people and people disadvantaged in other ways to find temporary placements in jobs in their local community. This placement gives people the experience and skills needed to find employment elsewhere once their time in the CE scheme is up. There are two categories of CE scheme workers depending on the number of hours worked. Until recently it was possible for part time CE scheme workers, who are paid to work, to claim other social welfare benefits. Many people, mainly female, were employed in the community crèches as part time workers. That meant, people with no qualifications, were encouraged to work with children – without any consideration, regardless of qualifications whether they have any interest in young children and their development. This is not to say that all CE workers were disinterested in children, but many did not seem to view this as a choice, and being able to hold onto other social welfare benefits had some limited, but attractive, financial advantages. The scheme was administered by the Department of Social Protection. According to the Department of Social Protection's figures on their website 24,000 people were employed in the CE Scheme in 2012, 2,200 of those places were ring-fenced for childcare (childcare services include crèche facilities, playschools, child-minders, and after school services) (Department of Social Welfare, 2012). While it is impossible to know from the Department of Social Protection figures how childcare workers are employed in each of the 4,300 childcare centres in Ireland, it is probably fair to assume that many are employed in the community crèches. Perhaps in attempting to solve long time unemployment, and the needs of parents for reasonably priced day care, the Department have sent a message that childcare can be left to those with few skills. And perhaps it is this attitude to childcare that informs the sector – how they view themselves and how they are viewed by others.

Semi-State Bodies:

Pobal,, an non-profit organisation with charitable status, has a mandate to manage funding programmes on behalf of the Irish government and the European Union, and fosters piloting new programmes to help address improved social inclusion and equality. At the request of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs there is an invitation for communities to put in an application for funds under the 'Area Based Response to Child Poverty (Pobal, 2013) initiative. The applications must show a level of collaborations between service providers, and aims to fill the gap in services while avoiding duplication. The deadline for those applications was 31 May 2013. While collaboration between services is obviously to be encouraged, there may be an unintended consequence or message for those services because, while cooperating within their own areas, they are in essence competing with other areas to help the most disadvantaged.

IDA Ireland, talk on their website about the supply of highly qualified workers with language, technical and customer service skills. The IDA's role is to encourage investment in Ireland and so highlight the high number of graduates, with 45% of the population achieving 3rd level education (IDA Ireland, 2013), makes sense, but it hardly the complete picture. That still leaves us with the results of the PISA tests which showed Ireland literacy ranking decreased dramatically – from 5th place to 19th place – and, results in maths and science were

below average (OECD, 2009), and this is despite increased spending on education between 2000 and 2008 (4.5 to 5.6% of GDP) (FinFacts Ireland, 2009).

Research:

So while almost half of the population are educated to degree level the country has a whole section of the population – 25% who are functionally illiterate. There was considerable attention drawn to the same fact when in l997 the International Adult Literacy Skills Survey (IALS) survey was published and it claimed that nearly a quarter of Irish adults had problems with even a simple literacy task and had scored at the lowest level, while a further 32% had scored at the second lowest level (Morgan, Kett, 2003)

The rates for the prison population are quiet stark. In 2008, 520 prisoners were enrolled in education at Mountjoy prison, of those 20% could not read or write and 30% could only sign their name (Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT), 2013).

As of 7 March 2013 the prison population was 4,306 people, the majority of whom have never passed a state exam and half left school before 15 years of age (IPRT, 2013). These findings are in keeping with more recent research by Deirdre McCarthy on young people in the North East Inner City of Dublin. That research titled *The Boundary Wall* (McCarthy, 2013) talks about the anger in the young people about their limited life chances. They feel that they were told that education was very important, but then made choices about subjects and levels of education (Leaving Certificate applied or Foundation Mathematics) that has left them with limited opportunities. They do not have enough points to get into College, or even enough to get into a post Leaving Certificate course as a route to college and with the high unemployment in the area getting a job is proving difficult. The results of Morgan and Kett's (2003) research make clear that there is a link between anti-social behaviour and low literacy levels, not that a direct link can be made but the restrictions of low literacy in terms of further education and ability to get a job 'become a pre-disposing factor in criminal activity, and there is also relationship between serious drug use with people who lack education or job opportunities. Reading of the anger of the young people in the North East Inner City you can see how this may play out for these young people and their communities in the near future (McCarthy, 2013). Prisoners in Ireland are 25 times more likely to come from a deprived area – and on release will return there (IPRT, 2013).

The average cost of imprisonment was €65,404 per prisoner, per year in 2012 (IPRT, 2013).

Our education system has been described by Dr Ed Walsh, Founder of the University of Limerick as 'broken' (Walsh, 2011). He talks about the recent results of the PISA test where the literacy skills of our children has decreased dramatically. Certainly the experience of the young people in the Boundary Wall research would give credence to Ed Walsh's claim that the system is broken.

The Numbers:

The childcare sector in Ireland employs approximately 21,000 people, mainly female (2-3% male), 76% of whom have achieved Fetac Level 5 – that in effect means that close to one quarter of the staff dealing with the youngest children have not reached that level. There are 4,300 children care centres in Ireland, which is a higher number then the combined number for primary and second level schools combined (Pobal, 2013). The amount the government spends on childcare services in Ireland amounts to €2,629 per child, which is lower than the EU average of €5,189.

The proportion of government money spent on education fell by 40% in the ten years between 2000 and 2010 – the Celtic Tiger years! The OECD figures show that the proportion of education spending in Ireland was 13.7% in 2000 but only 12.6% in 2010. This drop in spending left Ireland ranking 29th out of 32 OECD countries for spending on education (OECD 2013).

Ireland's spending on education ranks forty third in the world – placing Ireland between Hungary (forty second) and the Ukraine (forty fourth) in terms of spending (OECD, 2013), but perhaps more damning is the fact that Ireland spends 71% of the education budget on pay, compared to the European average of 63% (OECD, 2013).

The percentage of money spent by the Government on children and families is 44% for the later years (12-17 year olds), 37% for the middle years (6-11) and smallest percentage on the youngest age (0-5) - Ireland's spending on young children is weak by international standards, and a proportion of that spent on the early years is in the form of cash benefits and not direct service (OECD, 2010). The inverse relationship between brain development and public spending will be addressed in the literature review when discussing the views of Professor James Heckman – the Nobel prize- winning economist.

The Debate about Education in Ireland - summary

With all that is going on – revising the Junior Cycle, initiating task forces to look at apprenticeship schemes, initiatives to address area based poverty, the PISA results and the literacy problems amongst the prison population, the IDA touting of Ireland's high graduate rates, the contradictory messages make it difficult to make the case for early intervention programmes with all the other schemes also trying to make their case. Keeping in mind the perhaps unintended, but clear message by the Department of Social Protection that child-minding can be put into the hands of the long term unemployed, who can learn as they go along on the job.

But I wanted to understand what people think it is answer to the challenges Ireland faces in connection to investing in education. I am involved in early education and believe and understand that good quality early education programmes could help with a lot of the problems we are facing.

Introduction to thesis:

This thesis sets out to make the case for establishing early education programmes, with its potential benefits for children's success in the both the educational system and in positive life outcomes, as there appears to be a lack of understanding of the huge savings that could be made if good quality early education was universally available. This thesis will also try and work out if there is resistance to investment in early education.

My hypotheses is that the public had no understanding of the importance of early education, or believed that investment in education is better placed later in a child's life – as in Ireland third level education is free - while a debate is on-going about introducing a second free pre-school year.

Literature Review:

Introduction to literature review:

There are a number of themes running through the literature:

- Lack of exposure to words (Hart and Risley, 1995) leads to deficits in language skills (Levenstein, l971) and problems later in life (Webster-Stanton and Taylor 2001);
- Parental Involvement is an important factor in children's school success (Levenstein, 1970; Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird and Kupzyk 2010; Skwarchuk, 2009, Bleach, 2010);
- Early intervention has an economic argument to it (Allen, 2010; Heckman, 2008);

The literature review begins by discussing two government sponsored research reports – one by the United States Government in l964 (Kelly, Verdman and McGuire) and second for the Government of the United Kingdom (Allen, 2010, 2011). These studies take place almost half a century apart, but they are asking the same question – how to ensure we have successful outcomes for children in terms of completing school and staying out of trouble with the law Kelly et al. (1964) are very clear about the importance of language development, which is a theme also taken up by Levenstein (l971), while the Allen report takes about the economic benefit of early education. The economic argument is the theme for the writing of Heckman (2008), who claims that programmes for pre-schoolers are a way of alleviating poverty. Low literacy skills and future legal problems are addressed by Conway and Brown (2004) and in the writing of Reynolds, Temple, Robertson and Mann (2001), while the word deficit problems for children from lower socio-economic groups is taken up by Hart and Risley (l995).

For the purposes of the study the expressions early intervention, early education programmes and programmes for pre-schoolers all have similar meaning. The aim of the research is to understand barriers and resistance to implementation of programmes that would ensure that children are prepared for success in school, without examining the merits of individual programmes.

When conducting the literature review I tried to select studies that spanned the decades, to demonstrate that the case for early intervention has been known for some years. I start the review with Kelly et al. (l964) who were asked by the United States Government to ascertain the reasons for the high numbers of children not finishing school in Texas. The exact same research question was put to Levenstein (l971) about the high dropout rate for children in New York. More recently at the request of the British Government, Rt. Hon Graham Allen, MP, did a comprehensive examination of early 'intervention programmes around the English speaking world 'and claimed that early intervention is the 'social and emotional bedrock' for positive outcomes for children (Allen 2011, 2012).

High School Drop (children not finishing school) rates:

The Human Talent Project, Laboratory of Human Behaviour at the University of Texas received a grant from the United States Government, to examine the causes of the high school dropout rate in Texas. The University studied the outcomes for 884 males in 7th grade in four rural Texas communities to see if there were some predictors of later failure either leaving school early or getting in legal trouble (Kelly et al. 1964). It appears that those who would get into trouble and/or drop out of school were identifiable with some degree of accuracy as boys who had some difficulty with 'controlling impulses', lower class (their terminology) children were also more likely to get into trouble with the law then their middle class peers. Language scores were used and the boys' own descriptions of themselves as talkers were taken into account. Language (lack of language) and listening skills were issues for the boys who ultimately failed. These results are interesting when you consider the later work of Levenstein (1970) who was asked to source the reasons for high school dropout rates. The children, in the Texas study, were 13 years old when first tested, and the predictions about their future, given their difficulties were already clear. The University of Nebraska study which took place many decades later talked about the social competencies of young children and the impact it would have on children's outcomes, but difficulties were already identified for children much earlier (Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, and Kupzyk, 1964).

Levenstein, (l970) the founder of the Parent Child Home Program, researched the impact of verbal interaction for at risk toddlers and found that a child's intellectual development is closely linked to his verbal growth and his mother can influence his cognitive development by the amount and quality of her verbal interactions with him. The Parent Child Home Program empowers parents in their role as the child's first and best teacher by modelling ways to enhance the literacy environment of the home.

In keeping with Levenstein's findings Campbell & Ramsey (1993) conducted research into the effectiveness of early intervention programmes on 'intellectual and academic achievement' for children from low income families. They had postulated that there was a connection between poverty and less then optimal cognitive development and were trying to evaluate the long term benefits, if any, of the Carolina Abecedarian Preschool Project, and found that early IQ gains had persisted after 7 years of regular school. They claim that the gains were one of the broadest and long lasting benefits reported for an early childhood

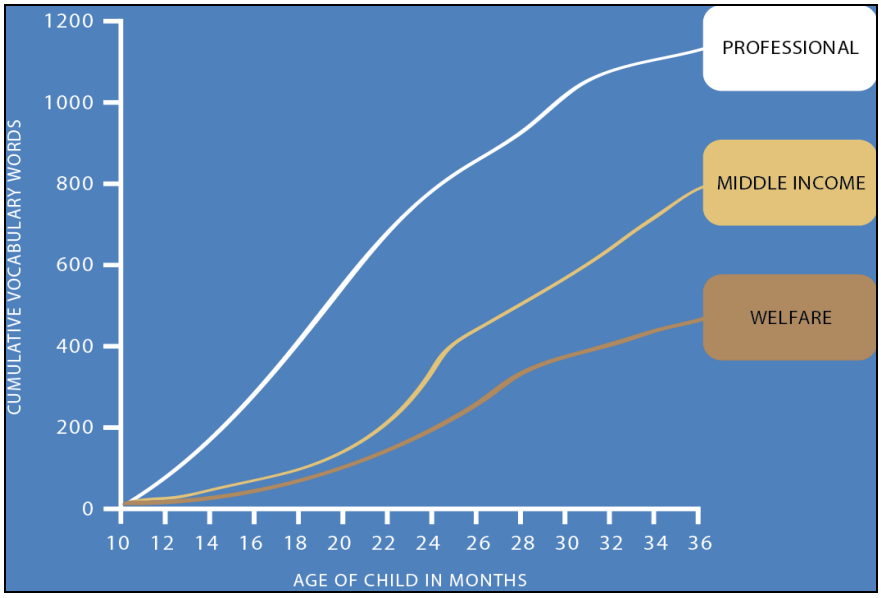
program, and, more interestingly, the gains were more pronounced at 12 years of age then they were at 8!

Brunder (1993) examined the integration of children of special needs into main stream early intervention programs to see if it was of long term benefit to those children. Part of the rationale for this research was the legal requirement by the US government following civil rights legislation which guaranteed the right for every child to be educated within mainstream classrooms. It was believed that children with disabilities learn best when educated with typically developing children. Her research examined an "Early Childhood Community Development Project" funded in part by the University of Connecticut to design, implement and assess a method of delivery of a programme for children under the age of 3, and a program of special education for children between 3 and 5. Brunder claims that when there is a clear philosophy beforehand setting out the aims and objectives of the programmes, and where there is professionalism and a shared vision within the staff, these programmes do provide benefits for both families and children. She also claims that often in the rush to provide services that many programmes lack the needed philosophical perspective and fail to be of help to either families or their children. In her conclusions she talks about the effectiveness of delivering early intervention programmes and claims that it helped build a new body of knowledge about what is required to deliver programmes to special needs children within a community setting, and while there was a lot of resistance to trying this model the results were entirely dependent on the competencies of the staff. Specialized skills are needed, but when that is part of the on-going training of staff the results for all children – and their families – are positive.

Conroy and Brown (2004) make the case for early identification of young children who have shown signs of emotional or behavioural disorders, and claim that early intervention, along with societal change, is needed to change the outcomes for those children. Children – very young children – can exhibit behaviours as a result of exposure to domestic violence, any kind of substance abuse, and neglect either benign or deliberate, and can show a discernible delay in social-emotional competencies (which bring us back again to the research of Kelly et al, 1964). The delays will show in a child as young as one (year old), and can persist until addressed appropriately. While children's exposure to risk factors, and the long term debilitating effects of such exposure, is well documented they claim that society has made no concerted effort to stem the problems early on, when the chances of success are greater. The researchers described difficulties with diagnoses and an inability of the individual states to provide services to those at risk. Children with a clearly defined diagnoses, (Down's or cerebral palsy) are getting services, but there is a reluctance to employ the 'at risk' category, so those children are left without any help. The consequences, for those children and for society are well known. Children who exhibit early signs of behavioural disorders need to be identified and helped early if their outcomes are to be better than those predicted in the study by Kelly et al (1964, p.233).

Early Word Deficit:

A longitudinal research project undertaken by the University of Kansas talks about the word deficit gap between children from different socio-economic backgrounds, and the long term impact on the ability of children to learn language after the age of three (Hart & Risley, 1995). Children from what the researchers describe as 'welfare families' hear about a third less words then children from 'professional families' and that gap is never bridged.



Background Differences in Language Development (Hart and Risley 1995).

Children of the welfare parents hear on average one third less words then children growing up in professional families – before the age of five. Lack of exposure to words, and their meaning, leads to difficulties learning to read and the consequences of low readings skills are documented in the research of Kelly (Kelly et al.1964), much earlier in 1964, about the diminished chances for those children finishing school.

While Levenstein's initial research addressed the reasons for the high rate dropout rate in the US (mentioned earlier), further research pointed to the importance of the verbal interaction between a mother and child and the importance of improving the quality of conversation to help improve the cognitive development of the child (Levenstein, 1971).

Legal Issues/Drug Alcohol Abuse and Violence*:*

An interesting study on the long term effects of early childhood intervention programmes looks at both the educational achievements of the children involved and the juvenile arrest rates. In 2001 a fifteen year follow up report, was carried out by Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, Mann claimed that previous studies had only looked at the long term educational advantages – usually positive – of early intervention programmes so they decided to take a look at the connection between early education and crime – both violent and non-violent crime. They examined the rate of completion of high school for children who had

participated in a preschool intervention, as well as arrests and special education placements for children who had reached 18 years of age. Taking the usual exceptions into account, children who had participated in a preschool completed more years of education than those who didn't, had higher rates of completion of high school and thus lower dropout rates, and interestingly boys benefitted more than the girls. They found that children who had extended participation in programmes (from 4-6 years) achieved the highest educational achievements, but the difference was not significant. Attending a preschool programme also meant that participants have significantly lower rate and number of juvenile arrests, and a lower rate of arrests (both single, multiple and violent) arrests. Claiming that the research was the most 'comprehensive longitudinal study of a large scale intervention', (Reynolds et al. 2001, p 2344) the authors' state that preschool programmes have a positive long term effect and the effect is maintained until early adulthood. About 1300 children were tracked over the 15 years of the study in each group: those who attended preschool and those that began their formal education at kindergarten.

Webster-Stanton, and Taylor (2001) examined preventative programs and they discuss the known risk factors for children which lead to school failure, drug and alcohol abuse, and problems with the law. They believe that there is sufficient empirical research to support the idea that good quality programs can significantly reduce the risk of failure for those children. The early onset of behaviour disorders (described in the research cited above) can be treated early and more positive outcomes achieved. The paper describes many parenting programs and evaluates their outcomes, but most programs focus on the parents' reaction to children's behaviour, without examining the causes of the behaviour.

The authors look at many intervention programs which addressed substances 'abuse, violence, and delinquency in adolescence' (Webster-Stanton, and Taylor, 2001 p.165). They combined the three major problems together because they believe they share the same major risk factors. They looked at universally targeted programs (an area, not a family), school based programs and a few selected parenting programs. Amongst the many claims in support of early intervention, these authors claim, with a 50% accuracy rate (p.168), that future violent adolescence behaviour could be predicted in children as early as 6 (years of age). The lack of pro social behaviour in such young children makes it very hard for them to develop any interest in their schooling, so from the beginning, without treatment, they have lost out and will continue to be at odds with the system while their problems are increasing. To ensure their results are beyond dispute they chose the random control trial approach to their research.

The (British) Labour Government under Gordon Brown introduced the Sure Start programme to help alleviate poor outcomes for at risk children. Norman Glass, HM Treasury described the development of the programme in the UK (1999) as a radical new approach to tackling the problems of social exclusion. Sure Start aimed to improve the chances of children by giving their family access to support and advice and offered opportunities for early education (including space to play) for the children. It is a fairly comprehensive programme which tried to provide help in a more coordinated way and with the requirement that statutory agencies work together. The programme was well liked by participants but some doubts have been

raised in recent years as to whether the programme had the desired outcomes. Part of the problem was a lack of a control group to be evaluated in tandem with those involved in Sure Start. Pam Meadows, head of the Department of Education team which looked into the benefits of Sure Start says that the longer term benefits of Sure Start are not known in 2011, and as David Cameron, the current Prime Minister, has allowed Sure Start centres to close since his election in May 2010, those benefits, or costs, will be more difficult to track and measure.

Economic Costs:

Professor James Heckman says the economic return to investment is higher in the early years as children develop the skills essential for later school success. (Heckman, 2008).

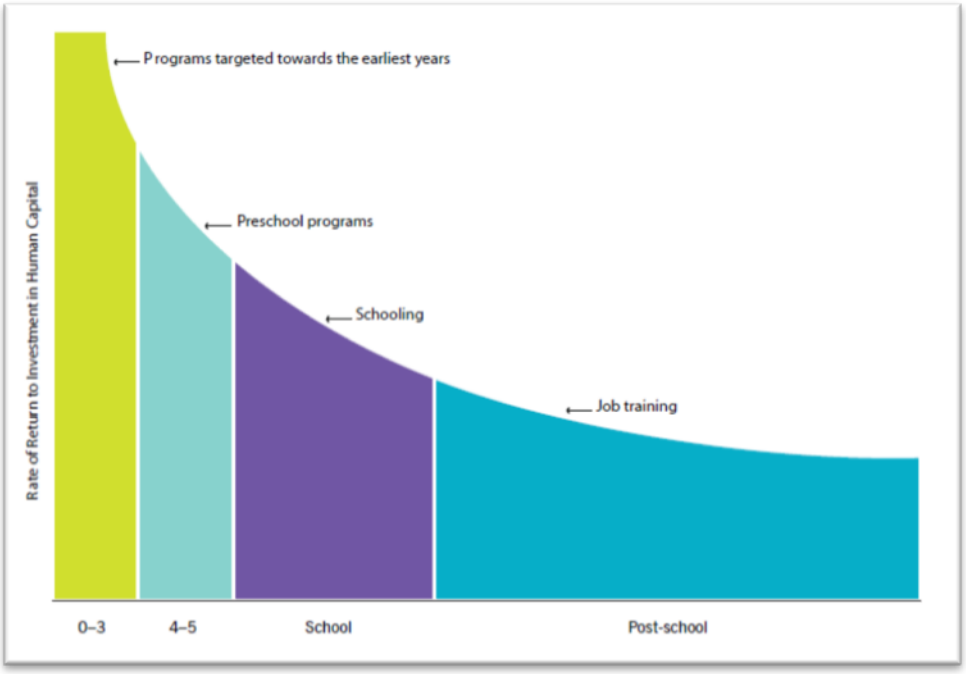
He claims that most arguments about investing in disadvantaged children are based on fairness and social justice, but the stronger argument can be made based on economics. And he goes on to claim, because the benefits are both measurable and very large, it is easier to see the economic efficiency. Stating the obvious he says that 'impoverished environments are powerful predictors of adult failure' (p.2), he explains that while there is cash poverty the more damaging effects are the poverty of cognitive, and non-cognitive, stimulation of young minds. Interventions that enrich young minds prevent the path to failure experienced by so many.

He is an advocate of good quality programmes for pre-schoolers, as a way of alleviating inequality. Heckman (2006) claims that the costs of remedial programmes for children who are failing are much greater than the costs of putting in place early the programmes that would prevent such failures. When talking about the challenges facing the American workforce he says that there has been a slowdown in the number of people going to college, meaning that there will be fewer graduates entering the work force in the next twenty years then in the previous twenty, and while less people are finishing high school increasing numbers are trying to get back into education.

20% of the US workforce is functionally illiterate (the rate for Ireland is 25%), while Germany and Sweden would have rates around 10%, and he claims the funny but sad fact that 20% of American believe the sun travels around the earth. Functionally illiterate people cannot read instructions on their prescriptions and the resulting costs to the health care system are large. Heckman has 13 points to his economic argument from the life skills formation, to crime reduction, to economic and social problems that can be traced back to low skills in the population.

In order to promote his wish to have public money directed at early intervention Heckman (2010) wrote at the same time an online version for the Wall Street Journal, summarizing the arguments given above. The title of that article is 'Catch 'em Young' and basically he restates his earlier argument about the importance of giving opportunities to children from disadvantage backgrounds as both a social justice and fairness issue and one that 'promotes productivity in the economy and in society at large'.

Economic return to investment in children's early years is higher than the return to investment in later childhood (as seen below)



Heckman's graph shows the mismatch between brain development and government expenditure on education.

Heckman's mirror the results of research of Levenstein (l970, p.426) when she measured cognitive growth in pre-schoolers. She claims that exposure to good quality verbal interaction (talk) lead to cognitive gains for the children in the intervention. Their conclusions were the same; the research took place thirty years apart.

Around the same time as Heckman's research, Skwarchuk (2009) was telling parents of pre-schoolers how to support their children's early mathematical learning. She claims that parents have got the message that reading to young children is important but the message of fostering prenumeracy is less well known. She sets out to see if there is a relationship between home numeracy activities and later facility in maths. She explains mathematical ability as having an understanding of number and place order, as well as counting and measuring and not simply the ability to do arithmetic. She claims that parents' personal experience with maths will have a strong influence on how they will help their own children's skills develop but also that numeracy tasks are seen as less important than literacy ones. Parents in the study completed a questionnaire and were given materials to use during the experiments, and were asked to keep a journal of the activities they did with their children. The activities and diaries were 'coded' for numeracy activities. The results were fairly predictable – parents who were comfortable with maths did activities with their children that fostered mathematical learning, and the opposite was also true. Disturbingly many, including those parents with good mathematical skills, still thought in terms of straight forward addition and subtraction, and not the more abstract concepts. Skwarchuk believes that there is work to be done helping parents with prenumeracy activities for preschool children and also believes that parents' belief that many mathematical concepts are beyond

the reach of preschools are selling their children short, as parents who do not have those constraints have shown their children capable of much more.

Parental Involvement:

Sheridan et al., (2010) wanted to find out how parental involvement and school readiness had an effect on preschool children's social emotional competencies. Claiming that the research has already established that parental involvement has been linked to a number of factors relating to school readiness they set out to see if social-emotional competencies were a factor in the school readiness equation. They looked at 240 children over a four year period and significant differences were detected during the two year period of the experiment. Children, based on reports from their teachers, had more secure attachments, were less anxious, and were more able to show initiative then their peers. All the children in the experiment came from high risk families, and while a high attrition rate is expected from this population, only those families who left the Head Start Program (federally funded early intervention program for at risk families) left the experiment. Perhaps, of most significance in this experiment, is the increase in the 'levels of attachment behaviours with adults' over time. A well-adjusted child is able to move away from his/her parents and make their way in the world if they feel secure in their attachment to their parents and have confidence in the world around them. In terms of future success this is an important aspect of development and for at risk children a huge achievement.

More recently, The Rt. Hon Graham Allen, (2011, 2012) MP in The Executive Summary of his report to the British Government wrote about the importance of early intervention emphasising that early intervention is the 'social and emotion bedrock' of positive outcomes for the children, and 'child development score at just 22 months, can serve as an accurate predictor of education outcomes at 26 years'.

It would appear from the literature that children are capable learners, more capable then even some parents realise; can overcome economic disadvantage, or stressful early childhood experiences, if given the right interventions, by well trained staff, early in life, and can go on to achieve at levels expected of more advantaged children, so the questions remains as how to overcome the barriers to investment in early education?

Summary of the Literature Review

The two government sponsored research reports at the beginning and end of this literature review are both asking basically the same question – how to achieve successful outcomes for children – but almost fifty years apart (Kelly et al, l964, Allen, 2011) and in between there is the Levenstein research (Levenstein, l971). While Kelly and Levenstein are clear in their statement about the importance of language to successful development Allen is adamant about the economic benefits of early intervention. That theme, the economic argument, is the one favoured by Heckman who describes programmes for pre-schoolers as a way of alleviating poverty (Heckman, 2008). Hart and Risley (l995) document the word deficit of

children from lower socio-economic backgrounds that also appears to be a factor for children who show signs of emotional or behavioural problems.

Conway and Brown, (2004) examine the legal problems for children with low literacy skills and problems with the law also emerged in the writings of Reynolds et al (2001) and Stanton-Webster and Taylor (2001). The latter two studies claim that there are long term positive effects of early intervention and by extension the lack of pro-social behaviour has outcomes that are far less desirable for both the individuals and their families and for society as a whole – Conway and Brown urge society to collective action to prevent the predictable outcomes for children at risk.

While researchers tackle societal problems from different perspectives (legal issues, high school dropout rate, social inclusion, economics etc.) the one unifying theme throughout the literature would appear to be that unless children are given a good start, there is a cost for them, as individuals, in diminished life chances, but there is a much large cost to society as it attempts to rectify problems later on.

Over the (almost) five decades of research examined the following themes seem to emerge:

- there is an economic argument to be made for early intervention (Heckman, 2008, Allen 2012)
- there is a clear relationship between failure to finish school and problems with the law in later life (Conway, Brown 2004; Webster-Stanton, Taylor 2001).
- there is a relationship between low socio-economic status and school failure (Hart and Risley. 1995)
- there is a connection between early word deficit and later school dropout (Hart and Risley l995; Levenstein, l970).

There is a body of evidence beginning with Kelly et al. (1964) and continuing to this day which indicates that early intervention has a positive effect on the outcomes for children. So the question remains if the evidence is there, what are the barriers to implementing good quality programmes for preschools?

Focussing on the economic arguments put forward by both Heckman and Allen (cited above) the numbers are compelling. Heckman claims that for every dollar spend on early education saves seven dollars later on – and this figure would be considered conservative, as an earlier report from Massachusetts Institute of Technology claims every dollar spent saves thirteen in future costs (Early Education for All, 2005). The Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn, has said that 'for a very small sum of money, approximately €5m, we could begin to improve the quality of pre-school leaders' and that is costs the government about €150m to provide a free pre-school year (Murphy, 2013). The €5m needed to up -skill the current leadership for the early years, will if the economic arguments are true, save at least seven times that amount in the future.

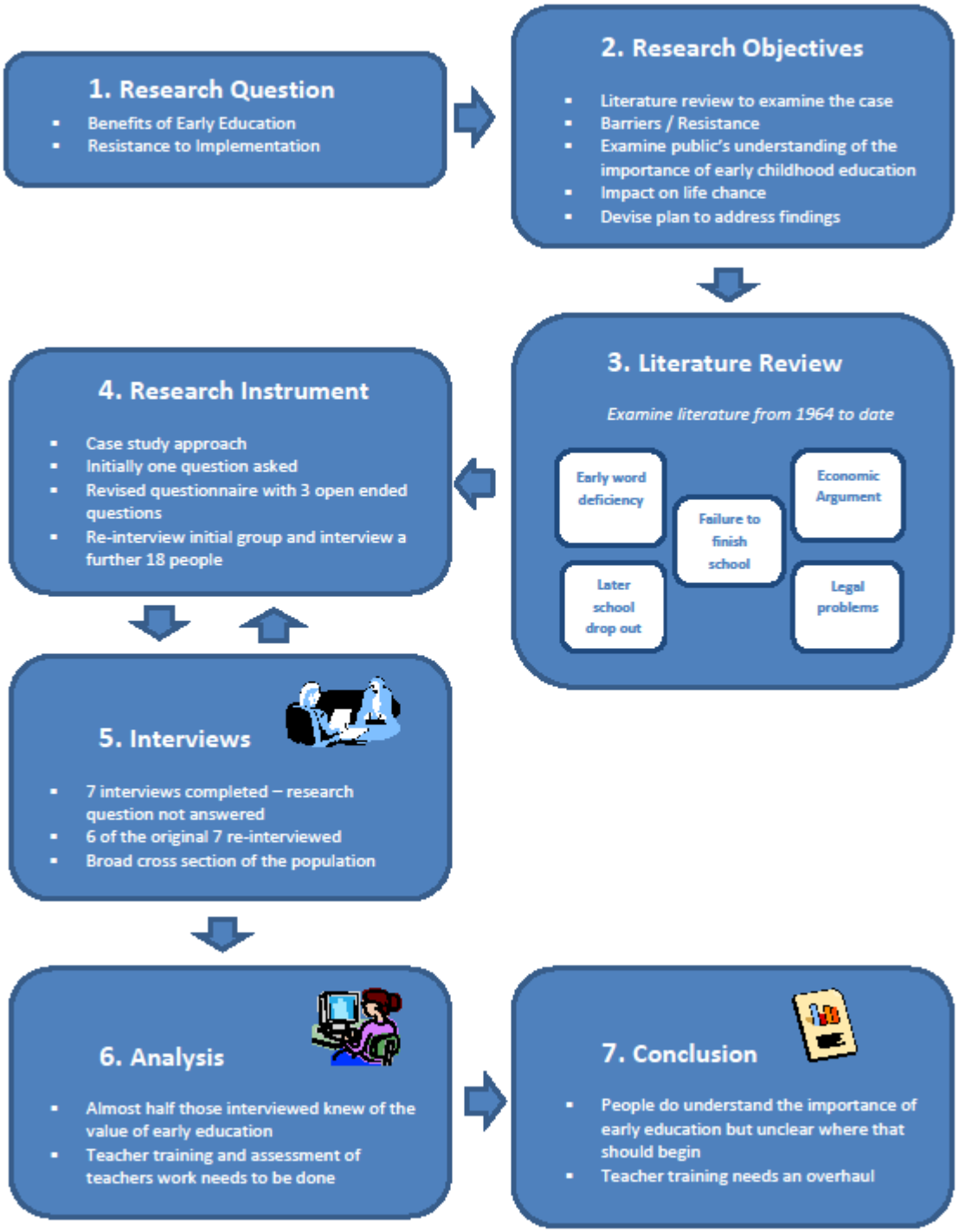
The cost of failure is quite high when one considers that it takes over €65,000 to keep a prisoner incarcerated every prisoner, per year , while the cost of a free pre-school year is

€2,850 per child, per year (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Irish Prison Service (2010))

Researcher Bias

The author of this paper is employed as the Parent Child Home Programme Coordinator with the Early Learning Initiative at the National College of Ireland. Obviously a firm believer of the value of early intervention every effort will be made to ensure that the views of those interviewed will be fully reflected in the research. I had assumed before starting the interviews that people just did not understand the importance of early education, which would account for the prolonged debate the country is embroiled in over the second free pre-school year

Diagram of the Research Process



Methodology

The purpose of this thesis is to try to establish if the reasons for the lack of investment in early education is due to a lack of understanding about its value and its impact on positive life

chances by the general population, and at the same time assess if the public has an understanding of the importance of early childhood programmes. If there is a lack of understanding about the benefits of good qua

lity education for preschools what can be done to address that, so that all children have a chance to be successful regardless of the economic circumstances of their birth, or other stresses in their homes?

To begin individuals were asked a simple question '***Where do you believe investment in education should go'?*** The rationale behind the simple question is to try and establish if the public has an opinion about investing in education. It became clear after about 7 interviews that one question alone was not going to solicit the type of response required to address the question. So two follow up questions were added: '***at what point should government start investing in education?***' and the last question asked '***if the government should be involved in education before the child reaches public school, and why'***? The aim is to establish the public's understands of where education spending should go, and if the case for early education is general accepted and understood. All the questions will be left as open ended as possible to give respondents time to think about their answers (Robson and Foster 1989, p33)

To put interviewers at ease interviews will be conducted one to one with no outside observer present, chairs at right angles to each other, no taping is done, simple notes are taken in full view of the respondent, and plenty of time given to the respondent to think over the question (Robson and Foster, 1989 p52). However, in the case of some of the Americans interviewed, (AF-26, JR-23, BH-29, EF – 29) personal interviews were conducted with the use of modern technology and interview them when they were alone (or said they were alone) using Face Time.

While clearly more time consuming than group discussions the choice of individual interviews was to insure against 'setting up a dynamic between respondents that will cloud the issues' (Robson and Foster 1989 p48).

The literature review reveals a large body of research, spanning almost fifty years, that shows the benefits to children and their families of good quality programmes in the early years. These programmes ensure better outcomes for the children and their families obviously, but have an economic benefit to society as a whole. The case study approach will be taken and interviews done to see if there is a theme to the public understanding of the value of early education. The answers to the interviews will be collated to see if there are any unifying theme to the responses, or to see if the responses cluster around a number of themes.

In Spring l997 the University of Texas published a paper on 'the case study as a research method', as a guide to how to conduct case study research, its strengths and pitfalls. The paper describes how 'a key strength of the case study method involves using multiple sources …in the data gathering process', while 'field notes record feelings, …pose questions and document the work in progress' (p.2). It is the intention of this researcher to ask many stakeholders in both the educational field, and the general public, to give their opinions on the case for implementing early childhood programmes.

Stake (2005) described the case study approach as 'both a process of enquiry about the case and the product of that enquiry'. He goes on to describe an intrinsic case as one where the researcher wants to have a better understanding of a particular case, and the study is undertaken because of the intrinsic interest of the researcher. He continues to explain that an instrumental case study is used to 'provide insight into an issue or to draw a generalisation' (p. 445). Perhaps because of the author's interest in the topic and the wish to understand the barriers to implementing early education programmes this research could be considered both intrinsic and instrumental. And he adds that the researcher must be 'committed to pondering the impressions, deliberating on recollection and records' and this require the researcher to be ever reflective (p.449). Qualitative case study requires researchers spending a lot of time reflecting and revising both descriptions and their meaning as things progress (p.450).

Yin (l964) in an article for 'Case Study Research and his book Case Study Research Design and Methods' gives a definition of a case study is 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (p.13). The importance of context to the decision to invest (or not) in educational preventative programmes should be uncovered during this research.

According to Yin 'the case study is preferred in examining contemporary events' (l964, p.8) and usually includes two sources of information – direct observation and systematic interviewing. Yin goes on to describe the place of case study in evaluation research as it is an important tool to explain the causal link to real life interventions, and to describe interventions and the real-life context in which they occur (l964 p.18).

Tesch (1987) describes the importance of the word 'theme' to researcher's vocabulary, and its many meaning to the researchers themselves. She wanted to know exactly what the researchers meant when using the word, and came to understand that it can have multiple meanings even for a single researcher. However, the emergence of theme – regardless of how they come about – is important as they provide a framework to describe what has been revealed by the research. A theme can mean the content, a topic or a statement, or a dimension, a major aspect of what is being studied. In her own words a theme is 'a partial descriptor of the phenomenon' (Tesch, l987, p231). Without that word it would be hard to describe what the research is about, or to find ways to describe the unifying forces of the research results. By collecting data into themes and evaluating what the unifying forces of the research results are, some patterns (of thinking) may emerge.

As interviews with relevant stakeholders will form the backbone of this research Tesch views on emerging themes is of special relevance as the search for common themes or shared thinking amongst the participants will form the bases of the analysis of the research. She also strikes a note of caution about emerging themes; in the desire to find unifying approaches or emerging themes, sometimes the unique can be missed and the researcher must also watch for 'idiosyncratic ways in which the phenomenon manifests itself' (Tesch, 1987, p.233). This

would be especially important to the current research, where the researcher's natural bias (already declared) may interfere with an ability to review objectively the data been presented.

The purpose of this study is to find out the barriers to investment in early education and while no propositions have been forward as to why that might be, there is, according to Yin (Yin, op. cit. p.21) legitimate reasons for that to be so. The purpose of the research is to find out – to explore – the reasons for the lack of investment, the 'how' and 'why' questions will capture what is being evaluated here.

The choice of a single case study approach seems appropriate when the aim of the research is to understand the barriers to investment in early education programmes, and to try and discover if there is a unifying theme to the lack of investment, or it is a lack of understanding as to the benefits. If axiology is how different people value things then the multi reality analogy dictates a qualitative approach to this research. The researcher will make every attempt not to impose her values on the interviewees, while at the same time recognising that many of those interviewed may already have their own biases towards investment in education.

The Interviews:

To begin seven individuals were chosen at random from a broad range of people – only one of whom is involved in direct provision in an early childhood setting – and all of whom had only a vague notion of what my job involved. They were both male and female, some starting their careers, others finishing theirs, and of course the people in between. A brief description is given of each person interviewed along with their age and gender and the rationale for choosing the person is given, along with details of their responses to the questions on the following pages. Interviewees are identified by their initials and in discussion by their initials following by their age – this helps identify the individuals as a number share the last letter in their surnames (**F**agan, **F**rank, **F**arrelly).

The single question posed to the initial group was '***where do you think investment in education should go?'***

At that point the research stopped as became clear quite quickly with the material gathered from the first seven that further questions would be needed. All but one of the initial seven was re-interviewed with the additional questions asked.

With the exception of the women involved in early education no one mentioned children under the age of 4 – the mention of pre-kindergarten by one subject included the four year olds and even one who mentioned early education meant 8-10 years old. So from the beginning it was clear that the question asked was only partially answering what I wanted to know.

I decided to re-interview all but the first person, and in choosing not to re-interview her, I also decided not to interview people directly involved in education. Her response was based

totally on her service and only related to things that directly affected her job. I was afraid I would find the same with others involved in education at different levels.

The single question approach was not giving me enough information and allowed for some people to get off topic. I hope that themes might emerge (Tesch, l987), that would help guide follow on questions, but as mentioned above not much consensus emerged.

The follow up questions would be ***'At what point should government start investing in education?'*** and then *'**should government be involved before primary school / public school / kindergarten?*** The choice of primary or public or kindergarten was made depending on where the individual was educated. Kindergarten represents the reception class for entry into the American educational system. The two questions are basically the same but did allow for expansion and gave an opportunity to gain an understanding of people's feeling about early education.

According to Chemail (1997) 'muddles can happen as you begin to make choices in your enquiries' – I believe that to be the case here.

I returned to six of the initial seven and asked the follow on questions. The inclusion the extra questions proved quite valuable and in particular the last question – '***should Government be involved before public school/primary school/kindergarten?***' - showed some contradictions in peoples thinking.

As with the initial interviews I chose a broad age range of people to interview- the youngest was a young woman (EF – age 19) who had just finished her Leaving Certificate in June 2013 and the oldest a grandmother (BF- age 70) who is very involved in the rearing of her grandchildren, as I thought that might provide some data for comparison. I choose people from a large variety of professions from a free-lance Artist (FA - 46), a young man involved in selling beer (AF- 26), a number of people involved in the health care system (JR – 23, BH – 29, and EF – 30).

The age span was fairly even distributed. I counted the 19 year old in with the 19-29 years old and there were six of them. There were six in the 30-39 age group, three in the 40-49 age group. I decided to count the man who said he was 'somewhere between 40 and 60 in the 50-59 age group, presuming that if was closer to 40 he would not have answered in that way. There were three in that group. 50-59 year old had four people, and the final group 60-70 (I included the one 70 year old) had six people.

Some of those interviewed had all of their education in one jurisdiction, others educated outside Ireland (blue ink is used in the detail to show those who were educated outside Ireland, or had received their primary education outside Ireland). Many had experience of more than one educational system.

Transcript of the Interviews:

Initial Interviews -

When the first seven interviews were conducted, the research question was not answered, so all but the first person, in this group, was re-interviewed with the two additional questions. Responders are identified by their initials following by their age. Responses in blue indicate that most of the responders' education was completed outside Ireland.
Full texts of longer answers are given in the appendix.

The single question posed to this group initially was '*Where do you believe investment in education should go?'*

There was little consensus among the group –but a couple of themes did emerge:

- The need for critical thinking skills
- Teacher training was important

One respondent said that '*government was involved with income support, house healthcare provisions…'* (KF-68) while another felt that government should be involved '*to give everyone a fair chance'* (EF-29)

Initial Interviews	Age/ Gender	Question 1 (initially) Where do you believe investment in education should go?	Question 2 At what point should government start investing in education?	Question 3 Should government be involved before primary school/kindergarten	Result 1 = advocate for early education 0 = no early education
ED,Child Care , 50 ? – female Manager / *employed in small community crèche and has been in child care for 30 years*	50? – female	Services need to be provided on a universal basis- specialist available on a regular basis – once or twice a week, at a minimum, who could help diagnose 'issues' for children. E.g a speech therapist in the classroom observing the children playing and watching for those that might need extra services. The same sort of naturalist observation could be done for O.T.			*1 – but wants it adapted to meet the needs of the less able children, so they don't get lost early on.* *Did not return to ask follow up questions* *Full text in appendix on page 40*

Initial Interviews	Age/Gender	Question 1 (initially) Where do you believe investment in education should go ?	Question 2 At what point should government start investing in education?	Question 3 Should government be involved before primary school/kindergarten	Result 1 = advocate for early education 0 = no early education
KF, Journalist / *Able to give balanced view on things.*	67 male	Follow Korean example of spending on education and getting it right. Korea's emphasis on education has transformed the country since l950. Early learning is the key to the development of a sane and functioning society. We have patchy pre-school service providers, conservative national managers and a largely female work force. High preforming teachers should be in area of deprivation so that the best teachers go to the worst areas. He would like to see teachers unions paying some attention to education policy and not just their pay and conditions.	Government meets the bills in education and in that sense invests in it constantly. We need to build a consensus around a sensible agenda, and then the costs will be seen as good value. Ideas come before money. Students – like North American students – should pay for their tuition to a much greater extent than they do today. Scholarships can pick up those who cannot.	Government meets the bills in education and in that sense invests in it constantly. We need to build a consensus around a sensible agenda, and then the costs will be seen as good value. Ideas come before money. Students – like North American students – should pay for their tuition to a much greater extent than they do today. Scholarships can pick up those who cannot.	1 *Part of a longer reply printed in full in the Appendix on page 39*

Initial Interviews		Question 1 (initially) Where do you believe investment in education should go ?	Question 2 At what point should government start investing in education?	Question 3 Should government be involved before primary school/kindergarten	Result 1 = advocate for early education 0 = no early education
EF / *qualified teacher* *Working in injury prevention* *Educated in USA and Spain*	29 - female	Heavy investment is needed in teacher training – for all levels from Pre-K to 12. Less emphasis on testing children more on the quality of the teaching. Children need critical thinking skills for the 21st century. Teaching should be considered an 'elite' profession, not just something for people who can't do anything else. Teachers should be paid for the job they do.	Pre-natal – parents need to know what damage they can do if they don't take care of themselves during pregnancy	From the beginning, to give everyone a fair chance	1
JC, software engineer / *product of American system – went through high school and then college and has been working ever since but at job he does not love. I hope that he might have reflected on that and perhaps there is a hint of that in his response about vocational skills.*	51 – male	Believes that teacher training is very important to understanding how children learn, and how to deal with children of various capacities – from very bright to struggling. Primary education is where investment should go. There needs to be programmes for the academic and those with vocational skills and the vocational stuff should be valued.	'Education' means primary school and secondary school. I don't think of education until Kindergarten, had no exposure to education until Kindergarten.	Believes it is like preventative medicine – understands about Head Start (American programme for children from low income families). People now struggle with changing work force and need to be more highly skilled could save on overall costs .	1*(had done some research between first time questioned and follow up)*

Initial Interviews	Age/Gender	Question 1 (initially) Where do you believe investment in education should go?	Question 2 At what point should government start investing in education?	Question 3 Should government be involved before primary school/kindergarten	Result 1 = advocate for early education 0 = no early education
SF / *educated in US, France and Ireland Currently pursuing PhD, this female was chosen because she has spent most of her life in education and is a person of strong opinions. Her working life has been as a recruitment director for an American college in Africa and working in a private school in Paris. So a life spent in education.*	32 - female	Believes that investing at High School level is the most important area, so for children aged between 13 and 17! She believes we need to improve critical thinking skills versus rote learning – the ability to criticize material so that when students get to college they can support their views and are able to read and write critically. Honour code is needed as cheating is endemic in Irish institutions. Focus on reading writing basic math skills and critical thinking from as young as possible	In the ideal world government would have well-run, efficient and fun structures in place for parents and children from birth. Funds are limited they should focus on primary school. Kids start school later in the US (vs. Ireland and France), so invest when the children have to be in school.	More needs to be done to improve high school, especially for kids not going to college. Proper technical skills training should be seen as a good option for kids who are clever with their hand. Yes government should invest from birth – but if there is no money there is no money. Go for school aged kids.	0
AF / product of the American educational system/struggled through school	26 – male	High School, need to mould kids to get them to go to college. Claims he did nothing in elementary school.	From kindergarten, but not too much, but just to get started	Not before kindergarten it is not education – it is babysitting. They have better things to spend their money on	*0* *Initially felt unqualified to answer the question – when pushed to think about his experience came up with the answers here.*
JR / product of American system, did very well, high school to college to job	23-female	Believes investment in middle school (ages 12-14) because that is the time when children can go in different directions. There is a chance that kids can be helped to go in the right direction.	Preschool because it is important to get kids ready for kindergarten so they can hit the ground running	Yes	1

Second Set of Interviews where everyone was asked the three questions at the same time.

Person Interviewed/*Rationale for choice*	Age/Gender	**Question 1** Where should investment in Education go?	**Question 2** At what point should government invest in education?	**Question 3** Should government be involved before Primary School /Kindergarten	Result:1 = advocate for early education 0 = no early education *And Comments as required.*
AD, Radiographer/ *Mother of one child* *Strong views on topics*	60 – female	Teachers: proper training some of them have appalling English	Not a day before 5 (child's age)	No – do not believe in preschool, children should be home with their mothers	
MO'T retired (food demonstrator/ *Grandmother to 2*	60- female	Pre-School 3 – 3 ½	From birth – clubs for children, places for parents to bring their children for interactive play and help with socialization	Yes	1
JO'R/caretaker/*works for 3rd level institution*	47 – male	2nd and 3rd level	Immediately, this year not to be waiting, no cut backs on education, this country depends on good education – secondary is the back bone of the country	No	0
GM – Artist/ *Grandmother*	60 – female	No idea – maybe secondary	Government already investing in primary That seems right	Probably at the time when mothers need to go back to work, day care or crèche – should be very well run!	1
SS – grandmother/ *Educated in USA, Canada and Ireland*	68 – female	I think I should say to the student, especially as the cost of education is so high and students are discouraged from accessing it.	Primary Schools	Yes, but the way society is going I understand that may not be possible	0 *SS was reluctant to answer feeling herself unqualified. Answer to question 1 refers to the high cost of 3rd level education in the US.*

Person Interviewed/*Rationale for choice*	Age/Gender	**Question 1** Where should investment in Education go?	**Question 2** At what point should government invest in education?	**Question 3** Should government be involved before Primary School /Kindergarten	Result:1 = advocate for early education 0 = no early education *And Comments as required.*
BH - *Product of the American system – holding down responsible job at 29!*	29 – male	Invest in early education is a start – funding needs to go everywhere, but believes that the critical age is 8 – 10.	Need to spread out the investment so a 'blitz' every 4/5 years, and especially for the critical years	Child's development is not there yet, would wait until the point at which they 'become human' and invest they can think critically – which he believes is around 8/10	0
TC, Maintenance/ *single father of two grown up daughters who did very well in the Irish educational system*	somewhere between 40 and 60' – male	Education is key for all members of society, computing is the thing now. Have to get the foundations right in junior and senior infants, then the rest is easy peasy. Teachers must be up to scratch, also good career guidance is necessary. Really good teachers helped my kid – parents are to blame when they want an easy life, they should listen to the professionals. Teachers mean well, happy kids do well, and the environment needs to be good. Good secondary school, helps if the school has a reputation for kids going on to college. Fee paying schools do well; ones run by the orders do well because they have a reputation to maintain.	Primary School has to be good – ones have the correct ethos old established	Junior Infants - really kids are like sponges at that stage – his kids from the beginning loved school. The brightest people do not always make the best teachers.	0 – *believes there should be funding for books and materials for parents and teachers, mostly for teachers as they are the professionals. Parents are biased in favour of their own children, but teachers are the professionals who rectify problems. Parents should be encouraged to read to their children every night – that is vital. And kids need to do team sports.*
AA – Computer Systems Analysis/ Educated in Iran and Ireland	29 – female	Probably in the schools – children start school at 7 in Iran	Primary Schools	If the money came in a little earlier the schools would have time to plan the year	0 Schools in Iran get funding as the school year begins).

Person Interviewed/*Rationale for choice*	Age/Gender	**Question 1** Where should investment in Education go?	**Question 2** At what point should government invest in education?	**Question 3** Should government be involved before Primary School /Kindergarten	Result:1 = advocate for early education 0 = no early education *And Comments as required.*
JF Chartered Accountant / *mother of two children who were in day care from 10 months*	38 – female	Broader practical approach is need. Approach in primary, the formative years, is too structure around work books, very prescriptive. Literacy and maths – not with work books children have to be engaged more with the concepts. Physical and nutritional – now an afterthought, should be part of a 'well rounded' child.	Finnish model where families are given a box which contains a cot, clothes, books and early learning stuff when leaving hospital. Might capture 5 - 10% more with the box. Interactions with the Public Health Nurses could be enhanced to provide more in the first 4/5 years. Early years scheme is only a year before school – but the results depend on the quality of the experience for the child	Yes	1
BF, Operations Manager / *father of two*	40 – male	Invest more in teaching techniques rather than rote learning, develop techniques for exams as that seems to be a focus. Learning is not child specific – not geared toward the individual child. No focus on logic. Things seems to have gone backwards – children learning to write using dots and tracing letters in workbooks	Immediately with the parents to show them how to educate the child, some social backgrounds know what to do, others do not and should be told before the child is born. 1 year of quality preschool might be better than 2 years of 'we don't know what' quality.	Possibly yes, starting in pre-school, my kids got the free preschool year and that was a huge help. Everything depends on the quality of the crèche.	1

Person Interviewed/*Rationale for choice*	Age/Gender	**Question 1** Where should investment in Education go?	**Question 2** At what point should government invest in education?	**Question 3** Should government be involved before Primary School /Kindergarten	Result:1 = advocate for early education 0 = no early education *And Comments as required.*
FA – Artist /*mother of two young children*	45 – female	Everywhere, primary and secondary are the priority	As early as possible – starting in primary	Possibly yes, starting in pre-school, my kids got the free preschool year and that was a huge help	1
AF-Social Worker / *father of three children -1 finishing college, and 1 starting*	56-male	My understanding from the research is that early education gives the greatest returns but it has to be good quality	Primary – or even earlier	Pre-school, I think age 3 - 4 something like that	1
AA – Software Engineer / *Educated in Iran and Ireland, father of two young children – who availed of the free preschool year.*	36 – male	Anywhere other than extra teacher remuneration, there is such deficit in all aspects of educational funding that it is hard to decide where the investment should be placed. Any of the following could do with money: School facilities/hardware, computers, sports facilities, general building work. Teacher training outside school hours, and linked to their pay/raise preferably and increasing teaching efficiency – especially for high school level teachers Expand list of subjects available, especially languages, by allocating resources to them NOT additional remuneration for teaching/administrative staff	Starting where they start now if ok (pre-primary)	Would prefer if they did, Primary school starts early here 4/5, but feels it is beneficial to start at least one year before primary. What is being done with the free preschool year is adequate.	1

Person Interviewed/ *Rationale for choice*	Age/Gender	**Question 1** Where should investment in Education go?	**Question 2** At what point should government invest in education?	**Question 3** Should government be involved before Primary School /Kindergarten	Result:1 = advocate for early education 0 = no early education *And Comments as required.*
EF – student / *had done some research about education as part of his degree*	EF – 22	Thinks teacher training, and it has to be good quality, early intervention and extra supports for the most at risk student	4/5/6/ the earlier the better, biggest impact at junior infants- resources should be concentrated at younger age	Junior Infants – earlier is better – the most good is done at the early stages	0
BF – retired civil servant / *mother of two and very active grandmother of two.*	70-female	In all levels of education, pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary	As early as possible – government should start with pre-school. The government scheme to finance one year of free preschool is a good one and should be extended to two. When children reach the age of three, places should be provided for them to participate a couple of hours a day in education where they initially learn through play	Believes government should be involved in the early years when children are eager to learn and possess the ability to soak up knowledge likes sponges. Children should be well on the way to reading and figuring out sums and puzzles and have a good vocabulary by the time they start primary school. Investment in education at the early stages pays dividends.	1

Person Interviewed/*Rationale for choice*	Age/Gender	**Question 1** Where should investment in Education go?	**Question 2** At what point should government invest in education?	**Question 3** Should government be involved before Primary School /Kindergarten	Result:1 = advocate for early education 0 = no early education *And Comments as required.*
RS, Aviation Asset Manager / thoughtful person educated in private school	32 - male	Teachers & teacher training Teachers are under paid and should be experts in the fields they teach at every different level Grants and private equity investment should be provided for research and development projects through a teachers career in the way universities do worldwide Standards and assessment development Facilities: Schools should be set up to provide an environment that encourages learning and somewhere children want to be. Think of how Google provides for their employees and the sense of common cultural work ethic that looks to get the most from its workforce. Schools should be competing to get children to come to them based on what they can offer. Technology based learning Schools should be primary drivers of uses of new technologies. Children should be exposed to research and development.	Today. Government should invest on continual development of educational system. We should invest in education at the same rate our global competitors invest in military defence budgets. As a neutral country we should have some advantage…	Absolutely. Education support by the government should start at once maternity leave is over. Crèches should be replaced by centres of learning and care to give children the best possible opportunity. Resource, childcare and medical professionals should be integral part of early care to identify every child's learning potential and capacity with any learning disadvantages identified and resourced accordingly. Investment should go into providing parents with more time off on a national level to be involved in decisions for their children's education.	1

Person Interviewed/*Rationale for choice*	Age/Gender	**Question 1** Where should investment in Education go?	**Question 2** At what point should government invest in education?	**Question 3** Should government be involved before Primary School /Kindergarten	Result:1 = advocate for early education 0 = no early education *And Comments as required.*
ES, Risk Manager Bank / *spends a lot of time with children and seems quite intuitive in her approach to small children*	33 - female	Performance management programmes for teachers to ensure that students are receiving a standard of education consistent with their peers and to ensure that underperformance is monitored and addressed. Early intervention so that learning difficulties are addressed as early as possible giving children the best chance. Appropriate facilities – there are too many children going to school in pre-fabs. arrangements, etc., to support working families and to facilitate a better balance between home life and work life for parents and their children and allow more time for education at home. At the moment many families are working to pay the crèche fees and time for education at home (e.g. monitoring homework) is minimal because everyone is tired after a long day in the office/school/crèche.	As early as possible. Learning and social difficulties need to be addressed as early as possible.	Yes. I believe a certain amount of pre-school education gives children an advantage when they start primary school and helps to identify any learning difficulties early on. I am aware that there is a government-run pre-school education scheme in place which I think is a positive thing. I don't know much about the administration of it or the quality of the education. I think parents have a responsibility in educating their children too (e.g. teaching them to read) but this assumes the parent has been appropriately educated themselves in order to be able to do so. I think government investment in other areas can support education ,support parents in educating the kids.	1

Person Interviewed/ *Rationale for choice*	Age-Gender	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Result: 1=advocate for early education 0=no early education *And comments as required*
EF - student /*just finished her leaving certificate*	19 - female	The whole system has to be rethought – investment into development of the system – it does not work. It was made for a different generation and for different jobs, it does not engage the young people. They can't relate to it. People from disadvantaged backgrounds don't care about what WB Yates said, it has no relevance to young people today. Not everyone wants to be a scholar. People want to get a job. System not meeting the needs of the public. Space – schools are crammed everywhere – need more schools or more space Did not physical education in school, so something has to be wrong there. Exercise should be in different ways – team sports don't make sense.	Probably, from the start. You don't know if a child has been listening to classical music or has been in front of a TV his whole life before school. So everyone needs to get the same start	Don't know. Tricky one. You can't send out ration packs of books to people (to read to their children)	0

Findings of the interviews: (N=25)

The majority believed in early education –

'My understanding from the research is that early education gives the greatest returns but it has to be good quality' (AF-56)

Interviewees were less sure when early education should start but this grandmother was clear -

'The government scheme to finance one year of preschool is a good one and should be extended to two' (BF-70)

- Pre-school or crèche mentioned as a starting point (N=12)
- Teacher training mentioned (N=9)
- Unqualified to answer (N=9) *but answered*
- Parental involvement mentioned (N=3)
- Critical thinking skills (N=3)
- Performance of teachers mentioned (N=3)
- Quality of the experience for pre-schoolers (N=3)

Blue print represents people who received some of their education outside Ireland, but their thinking showed no deviation from the rest of those interviewed.

Age & Gender Breakdown

Age Group			Total
19 – 29 *	3	4	**7**
30 – 39	2	3	**5**
40 – 49	2	1	**3**
50 – 59	3	1	**4**
60 – 70 **	1	5	**6**
Total	**11**	**14**	**25**

*** One 19 year old included in this group**

**** One 70 year old included with this group**

Scoring

A very simple scoring method was employed. If the person agreed that the government should be involved before primary school they were allocated a score of '1'. If they did not believe in government involvement before primary school, then a score of '0' was given to them. A decision had to be made about how to score people who felt either the current free preschool year was adequate, or starting in Junior Infants (children are generally 4 at that stage) was soon enough for the government to be involved, and it was decided they would be a '0'. For children born into poverty (Hart and Risley, 1995), or with a stressful home environment (Campbell and Ramsey, 1994) this is too late to alleviate the circumstances of their birth.

Limitations of the Research:

The most obvious limitation of this research is the small sample size (N = 25) and the omission of one final question ***'would you be willing to allow the government to allocate the money used for free third level education to provide programmes for all children under the age of 5'?***

Those interviewed were a fairly homogenous group white, middle class and well educated. Only two were employed in manual jobs. With the exception of the two manual workers, and the young interviewee, who has yet to go to college, all had college education.

The approach taken – to interview each person individually – was done, after much deliberation, but the time taken to get the interviews done was underestimated. The interviews themselves do not take much time, but getting them organised took much longer than anticipated.

Some people a vague idea that my job had something to do with early education and that may have had an influence on their responses, and in one case, changed a person's mind.

From the initial seven interviews one person (JC- age 51) did some research into the Parent Child Home Program after the initial interview, and so his answer the first time he was interviewed was what he thought at the time, but after some on-line research had rethought his position – so the gap in time between the first and second interviews had changed his view. From his limited research he found the case for early education compelling, which may indicate that the case to the public had not been made well enough for investment in early education.

Early education means different things to different people. To the two Iranians I interviewed (both with the same initials, AA–29, and AA-36), their schooling began at age 7, so to them 'early' was before the age of 7. The younger interviewee, who was educated in Iran, but came to Ireland to do a Master's degree in University College Dublin, thought the question about funding referred to the money given to schools at the beginning of the school year to get started, as is the case in Iran. Schools open and funds are allocated, but no money is given in advance so that the necessary resources are in place for the children beginning school. There is no early education in Iran, but there has to be something that is working as both of them came to Ireland and finished their third level education here – in a foreign language. Again the small sample size limits making any generalised statements.

The Initial Findings:

The aim of this research was to examine where the public believe investment in education is best placed and examine the resistance to implementing early education programmes.

The first interviews showed there was no clear consensus amongst the group but a couple of themes emerged:

- Three believed that critical thinking skills were needed (all subjects aged between 29 and 32);
- Two believed that teacher training was important (one was an teacher by training the other not);
- Only one suggested that he was unqualified or uniformed about the issues or expressed any reservation about answering (AF-26).

Three people interviewed agreed that government is or should be involved, and one could imply from the first person interviewed (who was not re-interviewed) agreement on government intervention in the early stages.

Combined results:

Taking the answers from question 2 (***At what point should government invest in education?)*** and question 3 together (***Should government be involved before Primary School?)*** – twelve people answered yes (just under half the sample size) with two suggesting that Junior Infants was time enough, and the other ten thinking that pre-school/crèche was the place to begin.

In response to question 2 eight people mentioned Primary School as the starting point for investment in education, while some contradicted themselves when answering question 3. While they initially claimed that Primary School was the place to start when asked the final question they talked about crèches for parents when returning to work, the benefit of the free pre-school year, with two mentioned that a second free pre-school year should be added.

One had a firmly held belief that children should be home with their 'mothers' until 5 (AD–60), while another young man (AF–26) believed that pre-school was just 'baby-sitting'.

Teacher training got the second most mentioned topic (N=9)) with slightly over 1/3 of the sample size having a view. For the eight who mentioned training some had a general view that more and better training was needed, whereas others thought new, or specialised skills were required, as all children do not learn in the same way. There is a feeling that a broader approach is needed with young children – work books/rote learning does not engage children with the material. The material not engaging young people was also mentioned by the youngest interviewee (EF-19), who had just finished her leaving certificate. There were two people who felt that teachers were not paid enough, and another two with equally strong views that they were paid adequately. Some felt that the lack of monitoring for value/effectiveness was not good and there was also a suggestion that the best teachers be placed in the areas of most need. One suggested that teachers needed performance management programmes to ensure that children are receiving a standard education and underperformance by teachers addressed early.

The themes that emerged from the combined results (N=25) are as follows:

- ✓ Pre-school or crèche mentioned as the starting point (N=12)
- ✓ Teacher training mentioned (N=9)

- ✓ Primary School as good starting point (N=8)
- ✓ Unqualified to answer (N=4) *but answered anyway*
- ✓ Parents and their involvement mentioned (N=3)
- ✓ Critical thinking skills required (N=3)
- ✓ Performance of teachers monitored (N=3)
- ✓ Building structures needing improvement (N=3)
- ✓ Quality of the experience for pre-schoolers (N=3)
- ✓ Teachers underpaid (N=2)
- ✓ Teachers over paid (N=2)
- ✓ Nutrition only mentioned by one (N=1).
- ✓ Greatest returns (on investment) (N=1)

Research Findings:

I was surprised by the results. I believed that the general population had no understanding of the importance of early education, hence the battle to get another free pre-school year in place. While people have different understandings of when the starting point should be almost half (12 out of 25) believed in early education. I had decided not to include those who said Junior Infants was a good starting point, but had they been included in this group the total number would have risen by another two points, bringing those that believe in early education into the majority. Eight people believed that primary school was the time for the government to start investing in education. Only two mentioned that the quality of the care was important (McCartney, K, 1984).

Only two people offered a more holistic view of the system – both thinking it was not fit for purpose. The youngest person interviewed who had just finished her Leaving Certificate and was a little exhausted by the process, said that the whole system needed to be looked at again because it was not working (EF-19). She feels that it was designed for a different generation and all this (her) generation are worried about is getting jobs. While her remarks about people from disadvantaged backgrounds not being interested in what W B Yates said could be dismissed as lack of understanding on her part or perhaps it signals a bigger problem. Perhaps their early education did not equip them with the language and critical thinking skills needed to enjoy or even endure Yates.

The other helicopter view was given by the journalist (KF-68), who gave the history of educational reform in this country, along with the battles won and lost on the political arena. (*The full transcript of his answers is given in the Appendix on page 39).* Like the younger interviewee he was quite clear on the need for reform and as Government meets all the big bills for education, an informed debate needs to take place. When education is discussed in

Ireland, he says, the institutional big guns come out and fight for their particular section. This opinion seems to mirror my experience with the first person I interviewed who could only discuss her setting, nor even her sector, just the problems relating to her service. The current Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn has been open to discussing problems and issues within his department and has benefitted from the teachers unions who had adopted a more constructive attitude lately. Education, housing and health needed to be linked together to meet the needs of the population rather than the piecemeal approach we have now.

Nine people mentioned teacher training – six of those were male and three were female – the only time gender seemed to have played a role in the responses. The small sample size does not allow for too much emphasis on this, but might be of interest in later research.

Performance reviews, and pay linked to performance, were mentioned by three. The two people who claim that teachers are underpaid want teachers training to be improved and teachers who are experts in their subject area. Teaching techniques and the ability of teachers to understand different learning styles were mentioned by two, while extra supports are needed for at risk children early on, was mentioned by one. One claimed that 'some teachers have appalling English' and another wished that our best teachers (perhaps another reason for performance reviews) would be sent to the schools in the most deprived areas.

There appears to be little difference in the views across the ages ranges – those who believed in early education spanned all age groups and both genders. However, the 'Grannies' (females over the age of sixty), with one exception, were very clear on the need for programmes for pre-schoolers. Without asking, I assumed that this view came because they understood the need of parents (their children) to remain in the work force and wanted the grandchildren well taken care of. Again, the small number of respondents makes generalisations hard to justify.

Parents were mentioned by three people – with one extreme view (AD-60) claiming no preschool education is required as children should be home with their 'mothers' until they are five, one father (BF-40) thinks parents need help in the beginning so parents can know how to help in the education of children and in his answer he also hinted that some people from lower socio-economic backgrounds might not know what to do. This theme was also mentioned by another (ES-33) who says that while parents have a responsibility to educate their own children, there is an assumption there, that the parents themselves have been well educated and know what to do. While I accept that the questions posed were about government's involvement in education, I was shocked by how few people mentioned the parental role. Yet the literature would tell us that parental involvement is key to a child's success, and can overcome many of the problems of disadvantage.

I think the message, whether intentional or not, from the Department of Social Protection, giving long term unemployed people, with few skills jobs in crèches and other child care facilities has done a lot of damage. One young person (AF-26) mentioned that government does not need to be involved before primary school as it is only 'babysitting'.

Only one person (AF-56) mentioned that 'early education gives the greatest returns but it has to be good quality'.

Discussion:

I started this research with a review of the literature spanning almost five decades. And if the researchers from a wide selection in the English speaking world are to be believed, the case for early intervention or early childhood programmes has been known for some time. The earliest piece of research commissioned by the US Government and undertaken by the University of Texas tried to find out why boys were leaving school early (Kelly, Verdman and McGuire, 1964). This same theme was taken up later by Levenstein (l970, l971).

Years and lots of unfulfilled lives later, Heckman tackles the same question but from an economic point of view (Heckman, 2008). He claims the remedial costs of interventions at a later date are much more expensive and the results less tangible. And if the children have got into trouble with the law or have drugs or alcohol abuse problems (Conway & Brown, 2004; Webster-Stanton & Taylor, 2001) rehabilitation is much more expensive.

I work for a community development project aimed at addressing educational disadvantage in Dublin's Docklands, and I understand the importance of early education and supports all through the educational system, and I have been reading the literature on early education for years.(see Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland for the full range of programmes offered by ELI or visit www.ncirl/eli), and accept that other people are not as informed about the issues as I have to be, so I assumed that the debate in Ireland about the free preschool year, and other programmes for children before they start school was because people did not know about the importance of a good start.

That was not the case from the people I interviewed for this project. Most understood the importance of the early years – there were difference of option about when they should start, but there was overall agreement by the people I talked to that early education was important, and there was general agreement that government are, and should be, involved in the early years of a child life.

The open ended nature of the questions posed meant that I got a huge variety of answers – and while the topic was government investment in education, teacher training garnered a lot of interest. (9 out of 25 interviews). Some of the information, while interesting, was not useful in terms of this research, but could be interest in later research. A level of dissatisfaction appears to permeate the answers – from teachers needing to be aware of the different ways that children learn, to different approaches needed, to the quality of the teaching. A number mentioned that teachers needed to be evaluated, and one even suggested that the best teachers go to the areas most in need.

While one answer to whether the government should be involved before primary school got an answer of 'not a day before the age of 5' (AD-60), it would be easy to imply that this person had missed the entire debate about early education raging all around us, her follow up

comments may indicate that she was not as far off the mark as was first assumed. She said that they should be home with their mothers. Leaving aside the gender bias, if that answer had been unravelled a bit more, I might have found that she believe 'mothers' (parents) were a child's first and best teacher, and it was important those early years were to a child's future success. But of course, that is all assumption, as no follow up questions were asked. There were eight people who felt that primary school was the time for the government to be involved.

In the initial interviews two people mentioned the need for critical thinking skills and I was surprised that critical thinking skills were mentioned, again in the follow on interviews by only one more person.

I suppose while I was pleased that people believed early education was important, there was very little understanding of just how early it should start, but perhaps that is where more education is needed.

I did not understand the delay in implementing another free preschool year for our youngest children, but believe now it is not because there is a reluctance to implement programmes but because there is little understanding of how soon education should begin. While I accept that there are issues that need to be addressed in terms of the quality of the experience for the pre-schooler, but they outside the remit of this thesis. I also believe that the Department of Welfare and Social Protection have sent an unfortunate message about early education and care by encouraging people with very low skills to work with our youngest children.

I think we should all heed the words of The *Boundary Wall Report* (McCarthy, 2013) when she talks about the dissolution of the young people in the north inner city (of Dublin) who are angry with the educational system as they stayed in school, but lacking the knowledge of the system to make good choices about the subjects taken and now have not enough points to get into college or even into a Post Leaving Certificate course which would lead to entry to a third level institution.

Conclusions:

To begin this thesis I conducted a fairly extensive review of the available literature on the importance of early education for positive life outcomes for children – in terms of finishing school and avoiding drug, alcohol or legal problems. Very young children who are born into difficult circumstances can overcome their difficulties if given the right programmes early on (Webster-Stanton, Taylor). Parents, even low income parents, can enhance their children's IQ with the quality of their verbal interactions with them (Levenstein, 1971). The theme running throughout the literature is the importance of early education and in the case of less than optimal circumstances for children; high quality programmes can mitigate the circumstances of their birth. The public believe in early education, even if they are not sure when that should start, and what it should entail. From the public's point of view there is no resistance to implementing programmes for pre-schoolers.

There is a complete lack of understanding about the saving that could be made with good quality early education universally available, and while Heckman (2007, 2008) and Allen (2011, 2012) made excellent arguments unfortunately their findings have not permeated the discussion about education for the very young.

However, I also wanted to know if the public understood the economic benefits of good quality education for pre-schoolers and there was a big gap there. Only one of the 25 people interviewed mentioned return on investment.

The case for early education is understood, and there seems to be little resistance to government's involvement in the early years. There was less understanding of what that might look like, or when it should start, but a few mentioned the extension of the free pre-school year as a good option.

I set out to find out, inter alia, what the resistance to implementing programmes for the very young was – and there is none. I also wanted to know if people understood the economic argument and it was clear that they don't.

I think the debate about early education has to shift now to be one of economics – good quality care for the very young and the economic benefits to the whole of society.

Appendix

The following is the full text of the response by KF-68

1) ***Where do you believe investment in education should go?***

I'm with the South Koreans on the importance of spending on education and getting it right. When I meet expat South Korans in Dublin, they speak English to me, but tend to break off and talk Korean to each other about how their children are getting on Irish schools. They send them home to Korea for the summer to catch up on the bits the Irish system has failed to provide. Korea's emphasis on education has transformed the country since 1950. I wish we could be a bit more like the Koreans.

My own view is that early learning – in the broadest sense of the word – is key to the development of a sane and functioning society. We have tended to leave that in the hands of largely educationally unregulated and patchy pre-school service providers, conservative national school managers and a largely female group of teachers. That is not changing fast enough, and whether it is money or other resources, we need to focus on getting that right. There's a perception that government pays too high a price to teacher unions for a small pace of change, and I think that is probably true.

Education spending, like health spending, is theoretically limitless. I take the question to relate to current circumstances in Ireland. I'd to see a broad consensus around what proportion of the annual budget is to be spent on education and within that overall framework how it is to be shared out between sectors. We need a more informed debate, and to watch closely what is happening in the UK where new types of schools are being "trialled" to see if the current slow pace of change can be accelerated.

I'd also like to see greater public recognition of what is being spent on education, and it galls me that when schools discuss their annual budget they disregard teachers' pay because that is met by the Department of Education. As if this were, in some sense, "found money" ...

That said, if I' had a magic wand, I'd pay a substantial bonus to high-performing teachers to work in the troubled schools in our primary sector. That's where we most need our best teachers. Not in fee-paying Belvedere College, but in the other and deprived north inner city schools.

2) At what point should government start investing in education?

My answer is probably covered in the answers to the previous and subsequent question. Government meets the big bills in education, and in that sense invests in it continuously. But when we discuss education in political terms, the discussion is around skills shortages here, lack of places there. We've not had the big debate about what we want from education, and every time it looks like starting the institutional big guns come out and start firing and we in are in sectional trenches again. Noel Dempsey TD when minister of education tried to get a debate going but it got sabotaged by internal tensions within teacher unions. The current minister for education Ruairi TD Quinn has been refreshingly open to debating the work of his department with all comers, and he has benefitted from somewhat more constructive attitudes among teacher union leadership. But Dempsey and Quinn have been exceptions. The last reforming ministers for educations were in the 1960s, Patrick Hillery TD, later president of Ireland, and Donagh O'Malley TD, who extended secondary education against the wishes of the major education interests of the day. For both, the reform was the central matter, the resources expended were the price paid, and the general view was that if the reform worked, the price was worth paying.

So if we can build a consensus around a sensible agenda, then the costs will be seen as good value. Ideas come before money. And in discussing education costs, I think recipients - like North American students – should pay for their tuition to much greater extent than they do today, and scholarships should pick up those who cannot.

3) *Should government be involved before primary school?*

Government is involved before primary school. The department of social welfare is involved at the income support level, the department of the environment at the overall housing and spatial policy level, the department of health and its various quangos (not meant in a derogatory sense) in healthcare provision, and various organs of local government are often involved in many aspects of pre-primary school life. The question is – how best does one pull all those strands together around agreed objectives while retaining the flexibility required to adapt to local conditions. (For example an inner city area obviously faces different challenges to those in a wealthy suburb. Both could benefit from having more male teachers, Both could probably benefit from being run by people with grater management skills, as the democratization of the school management structure has removed the religious orders which had developed those skills, however we might fault other aspects of their work.)

Education, housing, social welfare responses have tended to evolve as piecemeal patchwork measures to identified needs. Ministers of education have tended to be judged by the political skills with which they juggled competing interests and their demands for resources, and how they dealt with "bushfires" which ignited on their watch. Institutions have fought the good

fight for resources, unions have extracted a price for change. This is normal enough in a democracy, but what is missing and what has been missing for a long time is someone who fights the corner of the consumer, the child and the parent on the receiving end of the provision. A praiseworthy impetus to removes decision-making from the centre has weakened the input of the civil servants, but the power they have lost has tended to be seized by powerful interest groups. Government should assert that the family is at very centre of all this tax-funded activity, and set out a clear manifesto of objectives and code of conduct by which people who get public funds must adhere to. It also needs to keep a vigilant oversight of what is being done. We don't knowingly fund racist schools at present, at least I hope we don't, but we do spend taxpayers' money on schools which discriminate against the disabled, and on educational providers who practice a form of economic apartheid. So government in addition to disbursing funds must see to it that they are properly used, Government must adopt the consumer advocate role – because despite the protestations of the powerful interest groups they see themselves in competition with each other and need to win. Government's overarching priority is to make the linkages and to see that the child wins.

Full text of response by ED – 50 – *she was asked the single question*

1) ***Where do you believe investment in education should go?***

She has a belief that services need to be provided on a universal basis. So in her job, a at small community based crèche, that means they would have available to them on a regular basis – once or twice a week, at a minimum, a 'specialist' who could help diagnose 'issues' for children. In reality what she meant was that, for example, a speech therapist would be in the classroom observing the children playing and watching for those that might need extra services. The same sort of naturalist observation could be done for Occupational Therapist as well. Because the specialists were a part of the setting and not a 'random visitor' who upsets the flow of the day, more accurate, less invasive observations would be made. Parents would be told in advance that this was the approach taken by the centre, and then only if there was a problem with their child would they be notified that extra resources would be needed. Some of those identified supports could be included, if appropriate, into the practice of the crèche, and if further help was needed the family notified and the additional resources identified.

Special needs supports everywhere, so no wait too long for services, parents unable to cope with diagnose delay getting help, so if universally available within the classroom setting, children would get the services they need more quickly.

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