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## Evaluation of a Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme in Irish Elementary Schools

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**EVALUATION OF A HOME-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY LIAISON  
SCHEME IN IRISH ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

by

**Sandra Ryan**

**A Dissertation  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Educational Leadership**

**Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
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# EVALUATION OF A HOME-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY LIAISON SCHEME IN IRISH ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Sandra Ryan, Ph. D.

Western Michigan University, 1996

This dissertation describes an evaluation of a Home-School-Community Liaison scheme in Irish elementary schools. The scheme represented an effort to combat educational failure in areas suffering from social and economic disadvantage associated with poor quality housing, high levels of unemployment, dependence on state aid, and crime. The central aim of the scheme was to increase parents' involvement in their children's education. The evaluation study examined how programs in the scheme were constructed and implemented over a three-year period and monitored specified outcomes of program activity. Methodology included questionnaires, interviews, site visits and observations, and standardized achievement testing.

The scheme generated considerable activity in schools and homes. Meeting places and courses for parents were provided in schools and homes were visited. Most activities were directed towards mothers, and, in particular, towards their self-development. There was less evidence of efforts to develop skills of interaction with children that might impact directly on children's educational development.

The community-based aspect of the scheme, which emphasized the role of many agencies, besides the family, and the importance of partnership with a wide variety of formal and informal social systems, received less attention.

The relationships between mothers' characteristics and pupils' achievements in math and reading at grades 1, 3, and 5 were examined. Relationships between some status variables and achievement were positive, though moderate (ranging from .22 to .36). A number of supportive home environment variables were also significantly related to achievement, though no clear patterns were identified. Occupational aspirations and expectations of mothers for their children were related to their children's school achievements at some grade levels. Mothers' educational aspirations and expectations, and their performance aspirations and expectations, were significantly related to children's achievements only at grade 5.

A supportive school environment scale was not significantly related to pupils' achievements at any grade level.

The dissertation concludes with a meta-evaluation that found that the evaluation addressed all of the Joint Committee Program Evaluation Standards.



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Sandra Ryan

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This dissertation describes an evaluation carried out by the candidate of a program in Irish elementary schools which was designed to increase parents' involvement in their children's education in disadvantaged neighborhoods. The Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) program was prompted by the apparent failure of the educational system to meet the needs of a growing number of young people, a problem that has been a cause of concern among researchers and policy makers for over thirty years. Numerous interventions, many of them school-based, have addressed the problems of disadvantaged students, often with limited success. More recently, the emphasis of such interventions in many countries, as in Ireland, has increasingly been placed on the role of parents (see Goldring, 1991; Johnson, 1991; Slavenburg, 1991; Wallace & Walberg, 1991).

#### Problem Investigated

In Ireland, for more than twenty years, additional funding has been provided to schools in areas designated as disadvantaged. Based on this experience, a decision was made in 1990 by the government's Department of Education to increase resources for improving home-school relations by deploying school-based personnel who would

work to increase parental involvement in their children's learning. Thus, the pilot Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme came into being. In response to the need of the Department of Education for information about the implementation of the HSCL scheme and for evidence of its effectiveness, it was decided by the Department that an evaluation of the scheme would be carried out.

### Context of the Investigation

Schools selected for inclusion in the scheme were all situated in areas that were classified as disadvantaged and characterized by high levels of unemployment (up to 80% in some areas), poor quality accommodation, high levels of dependence on state aid, and high incidence of crime, including drug-related offences. During the first year of the scheme, 56 schools were involved and the scheme was extended to include a further 24 schools during its second year. Thus, a total of 80 schools was included in the evaluation.

### Study Objectives and Questions

The major purposes of the evaluation of the HSCL scheme were as follows: (a) to examine how the HSCL scheme was constructed and implemented (in each school); and (b) to monitor specified outcomes of HSCL activity.

At the outset, baseline information on the policy and practice of schools in relation to parental involvement prior to the introduction of the HSCL scheme was collected. The issues addressed related mainly to school-parent communication and parent involvement

in the school. During the second year, measures of pupils' achievements were obtained to serve as baseline data for later study of the impact of HSCL programs on pupils.

Issues addressed regarding implementation of the HSCL scheme included the following: coordinator contacts and communication (with parents, teachers, school principal, pupils, community agencies and individuals); parent involvement activities (in the school and in the community); and home visits.

In relation to the integration of the HSCL scheme into school practice, various stakeholders at school level (i.e., program coordinators, principals, teachers, parents, and pupils) were asked about their knowledge and perceptions of the HSCL program in their school, its advantages and difficulties, the extent of their involvement, their attitudes to and perceptions of parent involvement, and perceived effects.

At the end of the first year of the scheme, a sample of mothers was also interviewed about their perceptions of school and of their children's scholastic performance. Information was gathered about their home background (including status and process indicators), their familiarity with and involvement in the school, their knowledge about the HSCL program, and, where relevant, the nature and extent of their involvement in HSCL activities.

### Study Approach

The evaluation had both formative and summative functions. Feedback was provided directly on a regular basis to members of a National Steering Committee



comprised of representatives of the various stakeholders (i.e., school managers, teachers, parents, and relevant government departments), whose task was to advise on all aspects of scheme development and implementation.

The methodology for the evaluation included questionnaires, interviews, site visits and observations, and standardized achievement testing. Since data were qualitative and quantitative, analysis techniques included both content and statistical analysis.

### Overview of Ensuing Chapters

A review of literature related to disadvantage and the home is provided in Chapter II. Aspects covered include home background and scholastic performance; Irish educational policy and student achievement and participation; disadvantage; parent involvement; intervention programs for parents; and educational strategies to deal with disadvantage in Ireland.

Chapter III contains a description of the HSCL scheme, including its aims and principles, the structures through which it was organized, and an overview of participating schools.

In Chapter IV, an overview of the evaluation is provided along with detailed descriptions of the evaluation methods and issues addressed.

Chapter V contains a description of the policy and practice of schools in relation to parental involvement prior to the introduction of the HSCL scheme.

Chapters VI and VII deal with program implementation. In Chapter VI, strategies that were used to involve parents are outlined, school-based activities for parents are described, and patterns of parent involvement throughout the three years of the evaluation are examined. Community-based aspects of the scheme are described in Chapter VII, which contains descriptions of coordinators' visits to homes, issues related to Local Committees, and coordinators' work in the community.

Chapter VIII contains a description of the impacts of HSCL programs in schools. Impacts on schools, teachers, pupils, and parents are examined.

Chapter IX is a description of an interview of a sample of pupils' mothers. Data on family demographics, attitudes, practices, and knowledge related to education in general, to their child's schooling, and to the HSCL program are presented.

In Chapter X, a description of the reading and mathematics achievements of pupils in first, third, and fifth grades is provided, and the relationships between these achievements and mothers' characteristics are examined.

Chapter XI contains the recommendations and conclusions of the evaluation of the HSCL scheme.

A metaevaluation of the evaluation study is contained in Chapter XII. An assessment of the extent to which the evaluation addressed and met each of the standards for program evaluations (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994) is provided.

A summary of the study is provided in Chapter XIII.

## CHAPTER II

### DISADVANTAGE AND THE HOME

#### Home Background and Scholastic Performance

The relationship between home background factors and educational achievement has long been the subject of empirical enquiry. Binet in his pioneering work on intelligence testing at the turn of the century noted a positive relationship between test performance and the occupation of children's parents. Relationships between social class or socioeconomic status (SES) and children's performance have since been documented in numerous studies (see White, 1982), including studies carried out in Ireland. However, there is much variation in the strength of the relation that is documented in published literature with reported correlations between SES and various measures of academic achievement ranging from .10 to .80 (White, 1982).

Using meta-analysis techniques for integrating research findings, White (1982) examined the magnitude of the relation between SES and academic achievement and investigated factors that contributed to differences in reported correlations between the two variables. He identified three problems that have led to the difficulty of interpreting the strength of the relation between SES and academic achievement. The

first problem relates to the way in which SES is defined. In reviewing 142 studies, White found that over 70 different variables were used (either separately or in some combination) as measures of SES. These included what would be considered to be traditional SES indicators (e.g., occupation, level of education, family income, dwelling quality) as well as indicators that include measures of home atmosphere or home processes (e.g., academic guidance in the home, work habits, parents' attitude to education, parents' aspirations for their children, quality of language used in the home). Other variables included miscellaneous variables such as family size, population density, ethnicity, and mobility.

The results of White's meta-analysis indicate that measures of home atmosphere are much more strongly related to academic achievement than any single or combined group of traditional SES indicators. The results of an Irish study that examined the relationship between home processes and reading (Morgan, Shiel, Hickey, Forde & Murtagh, 1995) provide additional support for this finding. While status indicators of SES (i.e., level of education, home ownership, entitlement to state support for medical expenses) provided a moderate prediction of reading performance, the addition of process variables at least doubled the amount of variance accounted for in the various domains of children's literacy that were assessed. Morgan et al. also found that the significant process predictors had relevance to broad dimensions of children's lives. Variables that measured general attitudes and beliefs were not significant in the regression analysis, whereas variables that were associated specifically with the child were found to be linked with achievement.

A second problem in interpreting the results of research on the relation between SES and academic achievement is the fact that the use of aggregated units of analysis in the computation of correlation coefficients results in higher values than for those computed using individuals as the unit of analysis. In his meta-analysis, White (1982) found this to be the case with the mean correlation between SES (based on measures of income, education, and/or occupation of household heads) and academic achievement increasing from .22 for individual (pupil) units of analysis to .73 for aggregated (school or district) units of analysis.

A third problem is related to the way in which results of studies are frequently reported. Given a large sample size, a factor that may only be slightly related to the dependent variable can show highly significant analysis of variance main effects. Results that are reported as correlation coefficients are less likely to be misleading in terms of the extent of the relationship (White, 1982).

Another issue that emerges from an examination of studies of the relation between home variables and scholastic behavior is the extent to which home factors are related to different aspects of behavior. In a study conducted with a sample of 8-year-old children living in a disadvantaged area in central Dublin, Kellaghan (1977a) examined the degree to which home factors, as measured by Dave's (1963) environmental process variables, were differentially related to measures of intelligence (both fluid and crystallized) and to measures of school achievement. He found that home factors were more closely related to two measures of crystallized intelligence (as measured by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale and the Cattell Non-culture Fair

Intelligence Scale) than to fluid intelligence (measured by the Cattell Culture-Fair Scale). In addition, home environment measures correlated more highly with measures of scholastic achievement (English reading, Irish reading, and mechanical arithmetic) than with the intelligence measures. Despite restrictions in the variance in home environment, a combination of two home factors predicted 40% of the variance in scores in English reading and 30% of the variance in Irish reading scores.

Another area of research that is relevant to any discussion of home background and scholastic performance is that of family configuration. Such studies typically look at the relation between characteristics of family structures (family size, sex and spacing of children, and ordinal birth position) (Kellaghan, 1994).

The negative relationship between family size and educational abilities, achievements, and attainments has been documented in numerous studies. So also has the effect of increased spacing between siblings as contributing to a reduction in the negative relationship between large family size and scholastic performance. Furthermore, the effects of such family configuration variables appear to be greater in homes classified as lower social groups (as identified by fathers' occupational level) than in higher social group homes. Studies of the relationship between birth order and scholastic performance have not been quite so conclusive in their findings, with inconsistencies in results when the number of siblings is held constant (Kellaghan, 1994).

In a study of family correlates of verbal reasoning ability that was conducted with 11-year-old Irish children, Kellaghan and Macnamara (1972) examined the

relationship between verbal reasoning ability and social class, family size, sex, and ordinal position in the family. The simple regression coefficients yielded by the study were similar to those found in other studies and revealed a decrease in verbal reasoning ability (as measured on a standardized test of general verbal intelligence) as family size increased. Furthermore, there was also a direct relationship between lower verbal reasoning ability and lower social status. The finding on ordinal position was that it did in fact contribute significantly to regression when family size was held constant.

As well as being related to achievement, students' home background is also related to participation in education--the length of time students remain in the educational system and, when curricula are differentiated, the type of curriculum which students will follow, with children from higher socio-economic backgrounds being more likely to follow academic-type curricula than those from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Greaney & Kellaghan, 1984).

A study of trends in Irish education and of the use of human and material resources in the educational system (Investment in education, 1965) identified notable differences in the rates of participation in full-time education (after the period of compulsory education) of children from different social backgrounds. Children of parents whose occupations were categorized as professional (e.g., employers and managers, senior salaried employees) as well as those whose parents belonged to the category of intermediate non-manual workers (e.g., clerks, shop assistants, police) were more likely to stay on at school after the period of compulsory education than

children of parents in the occupational categories of other non-manual workers (e.g., bus or lorry drivers, conductors, postmen, caretakers, waiters, railway porters), skilled manual workers (e.g., electricians, carpenters, foremen), or semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers (e.g., agricultural laborers, builders' laborers, turf workers). The discrepancy in the participation rates was also found to become more pronounced as the age of children and the level of education increased.

A more recent comparison of the 1980 rates of participation in third-level education with those reported in the Investment in Education report in the 1960s indicates that there are still large discrepancies in the representation of the social-class groups in third-level education (Kellaghan, 1988). However, while students from professional and intermediate non-manual backgrounds remain over-represented compared to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (and this is particularly the case in the university rather than the non-university sector), there is some evidence of a slight move towards more equal participation rates.

In summary, three major findings emerge from an examination of the literature on home background and scholastic performance. First, level of social class or socioeconomic status is positively but not very strongly related to a variety of measures of scholastic ability and achievement. Second, the level of social class or socioeconomic status of a child's family is related to the length of time a child stays at school. And third, when curriculum options are available, there is a marked tendency for children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds to follow academic-type curricula which lead to third-level education, while children from low socioeconomic



backgrounds tend to enrol in technical, vocational, "short-cycle," or general educational courses (Kellaghan, 1994).

### Irish Educational Policy and Student Achievement and Participation

Over the past three decades, the interest of many investigators and policy makers has focused on those students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and perform poorly at school. Interest and concern developed for at least two reasons. First, the relatively poor performance in the educational system of children from certain socioeconomic backgrounds was seen as a failure to provide equality of educational opportunity, a principle to which most industrialized countries, including Ireland, subscribe today (see Greaney & Kellaghan, 1984; Ireland, 1992, 1995). A second reason for the interest in and concern for low achievers was that their achievement was not just relatively poorer than that of higher performing students but was absolutely poor. Many left school with very limited skills and went on to a life of dependency on state aid, unemployment, and sometimes crime. While these factors should not be related to low achievement in a simplistic way, there can be little doubt that a low level of scholastic achievement places students at an enormous disadvantage in the labor market. Students who do not take any public examinations are much more likely to be unemployed than students who are more successful in the educational system (Ireland: Department of Labour, 1991). So also are students who perform poorly on such examinations (Hannan, 1992). This topic is treated in greater detail in the section on disadvantage in this chapter.

Up until the 1960s, the Irish government's Department of Education played a relatively passive role in overall planning in education and in the development of educational policy. However, this tendency changed during the 1960s when the central government adopted a much more active role in educational planning. The reason for this is not clear and is thought to have resulted mainly from changing economic and social conditions within the country as well as international influences (Greaney & Kellaghan, 1984).

The change in the Department of Education role may be due, at least in part, to the publication by the Department of Finance in 1958 of a study of economic development which formed the basis of its first government program on economic expansion. However, it was not until the government published its Second programme for economic expansion in 1964 that particular attention was paid to the role of education in economic development. In the program, the belief was expressed that expenditure on education is “an investment in the fuller use of the country's primary resource - its people - which can be expected to yield increasing returns in terms of economic progress” (Ireland, 1964, p.193). The belief was also expressed that improved and extended educational facilities would help “to equalize opportunities by enabling an increasing proportion of the community to develop their potentialities and raise their personal standards of living” (p.193). Thus, economic and social factors can be seen as motivating the increased government interest in education.

One of the first policy statements in which there were specific references to equality of opportunity was made by the Minister for Education, Dr Patrick Hillery, in May 1963. Dr Hillery also made some specific proposals towards the achievement of equality of opportunity by proposing the establishment of comprehensive schools and Regional Technical Colleges and for the introduction of a common Intermediate Certificate public examination (which would be administered at the end of the first three years of post-primary education, or junior cycle) and a technical Leaving Certificate public examination (to be administered at the end of post-primary education). The intentions of these changes were that, through the provision of a wider range of subjects at second level, and through the extension of third-level education outside of the university sector, the needs of a larger number of students would be provided for.

Other general reforms introduced at the time were the provision of government funds for capital expenditure on secondary schools in 1964; an increase in the number of scholarships available for students in 1965 which was superseded in 1967 by the provision of free second-level education and free transport to school in 1967; assistance towards the cost of books and accessories for needy students in 1966; and the raising of the school-leaving age from 14 to 15 years in 1972.

While most of the reforms were aimed at second level, other reforms that were introduced included the amalgamation of small schools at first level and, at third level, the expansion of the number of places available, the establishment of a Higher

Education Authority and, the promotion of technical and technological education (Greaney & Kellaghan, 1984).

Three decades later the Irish government still maintains the principle of equality as one of the fundamental principles of the education system: “the State's concern is with a number of key considerations which should underpin the formulation and evaluation of educational policy and practice - principally, the promotion of quality, equality, pluralism, partnership and accountability” (Ireland, 1995, p.4).

Moreover, the emphasis on economic and social factors, as first seen in the 1960s, appears to have become a more central focus of recent overall educational policy.

The State's role in education arises as part of its overall concern to achieve economic prosperity, social well-being and a good quality of life within a democratically structured society. . . . Education is a right for each individual and a means to enhancing well-being and quality of life for the whole society. . . . The development of the education and skills of people is as important a source of wealth as the accumulation of more traditional forms of capital (Ireland, 1995, pp.5-6).

In relation to the principle of equality, the recent White Paper on Education contains a firm commitment to ensure that where “participation and achievement in the education system are impeded by physical, mental, economic or social factors, the State should seek to eliminate or compensate for the sources and consequences of educational disadvantage” (Ireland, 1995, p.8).

However, while in principle, support for the elimination of, or compensation for, disadvantage as outlined in the White Paper seems clear, one of the criticisms of the Paper has been in regard to the omission of costings of the resources that will be

required to implement the plans and recommendations contained therein “ the most serious gap in the White Paper is the failure to provide any costings or to make any specific commitments on future spending to fund the developments proposed” (Cullen, 1995, p.8). Until such financial implications are considered, it is impossible to estimate the extent to which the plans are realistic or attainable.

### Disadvantage

It is clear that much government policy has been concerned with the levels of achievement and of participation of students who come from homes of low socio-economic status. In Ireland, as in the United States, various terms such as “educationally disadvantaged,” “marginalized,” and “at risk” have been used to describe the combination of low socio-economic status and low scholastic achievement in students. The terms have been defined in various ways but the ones that seem most relevant in an educational context imply a discontinuity between children's homes and community experiences and the demands of schooling. An early definition regarded students as being disadvantaged if, because of sociocultural reasons, they entered the school system with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that make adjustment difficult and impede learning (Passow, 1970). In more recent thinking it has been recognized that the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that children bring with them to school reflect the demands of their environments and should not be judged as being inferior to those required in school.

In the United States, disadvantaged children are likely to belong to a racial/ethnic minority group, to live in a poverty household with a single parent, to have a poorly educated mother, and to speak a home language that differs from that used in school (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). It is obvious that these criteria do not all apply in the Irish situation. Further, while it may be important to develop indicators for use in Ireland to help identify families, students, or areas that are likely to be disadvantaged, one should bear in mind that the presence of an indicator does not necessarily imply disadvantage and perhaps of even greater importance, that an indicator is not the cause of disadvantage.

While ethnic minority or language minority groups do not exist on the same scale in Ireland as in many other countries, at the same time, there can be little doubt that there are serious problems of disadvantage in the country. The Investment in Education (1965) report, as discussed earlier, drew attention to problems of inequality in the system though it did not specifically deal with the problem of disadvantage. Since the report was published, several studies have documented the particular problems of children living in disadvantaged areas (Holland, 1979; Kellaghan, 1977b). These are described in the section on educational strategies to deal with disadvantage in Ireland.

The early school drop-out and poor labor-market prospects of students from disadvantaged backgrounds have also been the subject of several studies conducted in Ireland (Breen, 1991; Hannan, 1992; Hannan & Shortall, 1991). In an analysis of the workings of the Irish youth labor market, Breen (1991) examined the relationship

between the educational qualifications of a cohort of young people and their employment experiences during the first five and a half years after they had left post-primary education. A series of three interviews was conducted with a sample (n=1,100) of 1981-82 school leavers who did not enter third-level education when they left school. The young people were initially interviewed approximately one year after they had left school (May/June 1983). They were interviewed a second time approximately 1.5 years later (November 1984). The final interview was conducted in December 1987 or January 1988 about 5.5 years after respondents had left post-primary education.

During the first interview, data were collected regarding the educational qualifications and current economic status of respondents and their parents' occupation. In subsequent interviews, respondents gave details of each job, training program, period of unemployment, or period out of the labor force that they had experienced since leaving school.

Breen found a positive relationship between the employment rates and the educational qualifications (i.e., highest level of examination taken, if any) of the young people interviewed, while rates of unemployment were negatively related to educational qualifications. Furthermore, over time, the differences in unemployment rates for those with different levels of educational qualifications widened, with unqualified school leavers falling further behind their more qualified peers. In fact, it emerged that the initial two to three years were of crucial importance in influencing young people's long-term position in the labor market.

In examining the effects of training on employment prospects, Breen found that, not only were there no significant long-term effects, but that many of those who seemed most in need of such intervention (e.g., unqualified female school leavers) were unlikely to receive it. Breen concluded that although there is a need to provide post-school training and temporary employment schemes, such schemes in isolation would prove inadequate in addressing the problems of unqualified school leavers in the labor market. He suggested that since “the causes of early school leaving are to be found not only in the educational system (at both post-primary and primary levels) but also in the pre-school environment and in the complex inter-relationships between family, community and school” (p.4), some alternative intervention should be made “at an early age, built around the development of stronger links between school, home and the community” (p.84).

Using data from the same sources as those outlined above, in addition to data from a further subsample of all third-level entrants from the same cohort, Hannan and Shortall (1991) conducted a study of school leavers' assessments of the adequacy of their education and effectiveness of the second-level school system in meeting both its own stated objectives and the objectives of the respondents. School leavers attributed highest priority to “basic education” (i.e., basic literacy and numeracy skills) and to intellectual and cognitive development. Rated as being almost equally important were preparation for work and for adult roles, as well as personal and social development.

The satisfaction ratings for various aspects of educational preparation ranged from high to very high for provision for basic education and general cognitive



development to moderate to low satisfaction for most other aspects. In general, school leavers with the highest levels of education were most satisfied with the education they had received, while those who had left school without any qualifications (typically from disadvantaged backgrounds) were particularly dissatisfied with even their basic education. Furthermore, the single socio-economic background factor that was directly related to levels of dissatisfaction with all dimensions of educational provision was unemployment.

An important finding of the Hannan & Shortall (1991) study, and one that is particularly relevant in the context of this discussion, was the identification of “a particularly socially vulnerable and educationally disadvantaged group” which, though not very large by European levels (10 to 12% of the total school-leaving cohort), has “become increasingly concentrated over the past decade” (p.207). In fact,

the early institutional exclusion of the poor educational attainers has had a very serious overall alienating effect on them which appears to be permanent - they are the least likely of all educational levels to volunteer for further education or training courses, even where such courses appear to be necessary and feasible - and even when they themselves believe this to be so (p.197).

Among the policy recommendations made by Hannan and Shortall was that aimed at the reduction of failure rates and pupil alienation, namely home-school liaison, coupled with the development of programs for second-chance education.

## Parent Involvement

Following the major Head Start intervention in the United States in the 1960s, and the initially disappointing reports of its effects, many projects have set out to accord a greater role to parents in intervention efforts (see Comer, 1980; Davies, 1991; Epstein, 1987; Fine, 1989; Swap, 1990). When given such a role, parental involvement was considered to have made an important contribution to the success of programs (Lazar & Darlington, 1982). In Britain also, parental involvement has been found to be associated with improved pupil achievement (Athey, 1990). Reflecting these findings, many parent involvement programs in many countries today are seen as representing a substantial public commitment to the provision of educational opportunity for disenfranchised populations (Powell, 1988).

As in other social programs, two major approaches can be detected in ones which focus on family intervention. One approach is cognitive-behavioral in its orientation and seeks to enhance personal skills, knowledge, and teaching and learning skills. Programs following this orientation may be directed towards parents or towards children. When directed towards parents, they seek to increase their sensitivity to the importance of their role in the educational process, promote their acceptance of the perceived benefits of formal education, develop skills for interacting with their children in ways that would promote the children's educational development, or provide opportunity for self-development. Programs attempting to achieve any of these things may also work to change social norms in the interest of supporting and

maintaining behavior change related to education. Programs when focused more directly on children provide activities and opportunities for developing skills, knowledge, attitudes, and affects related to scholastic behaviour.

The alternative approach to the cognitive-behavioural one is community-based. Among the objectives of programs following the community-based approach are the establishment and strengthening of social networks to effect change in attitudes to education and in the conditions which support children's scholastic efforts; the empowerment of community members by facilitating the development of their skills, knowledge, and motivation; the organization of communities to address and deal with their own problems; and the improvement of the availability of, and access to, community resources and services. Such programs are more likely to be focused on parents than on their children though one could also envisage programs directed towards the mobilization of peer groups to support scholastic development, particularly during the period of adolescence.

Many programs, of course, do not fit neatly into either the cognitive-behavioural or community-based category since they attempt to provide a comprehensive range of services for families and children. There are two reasons for developing comprehensive programs. First, although there is evidence that would appear to support the idea that cognitive-behavioural programs that focus resources close to the teaching-learning situation are likely to be more effective, at least in the short run, in affecting the scholastic achievement of children (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993), the evidence is not sufficiently conclusive to indicate that resources

should be limited to such activities. And second, the needs of children and families are often so widespread that it does not seem feasible to concentrate efforts in only one area, while ignoring other needs. For example, many programs for the disadvantaged in other countries find it necessary to assist families in nutrition, health care, and child-rearing practices before commencing, or in conjunction with, activities focused on parent behaviors that are more directly related to the development and reinforcement of their children's cognitive or scholastic skills.

### Intervention Programs for Parents

In light of the relationship between home background and children's school performance, many attempts to deal with problems arising from disadvantage have focused on the development of closer ties between homes and schools. If children are likely to suffer in their school learning as a result of discontinuities between home and school, it would seem to make sense to promote home-school collaboration to achieve the shared objective of homes and schools in fostering children's development.

The development of closer ties between homes and schools has taken a variety of forms (see Bastiani, 1989; Comer, 1988; Levin, 1987; Macbeth, 1989; Slavin, 1989; Wallace & Walberg, 1991). Evaluations of these efforts indicate that helping parents become stronger partners in their children's learning can have a significant positive impact on parents themselves as well as on children's cognitive development, school performance, and social functioning (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993). It was findings such as these, as well as other considerations that point to the key role of

indicated that the adequate development of home-school-community relationships would require a teacher who would be assigned responsibility for this work. Schools' views of the nature of the home-school relationship indicated that the greatest perceived need was for parent education. There was less appreciation of the contribution which parents could make to their children's education or of the possibility that schools also might need to change. Schools, however, did express a wish to receive guidelines for their practice in the development of home-school-community relationships.

Apart from mainstream developments, a number of small-scale projects have also been carried out to help cope with problems arising from living in an area considered to be disadvantaged. In 1969, a preschool for three- to five-year-old children was established (Holland, 1979; Kellaghan, 1977b). What became known as the "Rutland Street Project," taking its title from the location of the preschool in a disadvantaged area in Dublin's inner city, was the first Department of Education initiative to address the problems of disadvantage through intervention with preschool children.

The area in which the Rutland Street Project was located was characterized by high rates of poverty and unemployment with many children also belonging to families in which difficulties such as ill-health, poor accommodation, alcoholism, or inadequate household management skills were a feature of daily life. However, it was also a notable feature of the parents in the area that they frequently made great sacrifices, often beyond their means, to provide for the needs of their children. While these

parents were deemed to “show as much concern for their children as parents in any other social group” (Kellaghan, 1977b, p.32), it was also judged that many appeared “ill-equipped to cater for the cognitive needs of their children” (p.32). Furthermore, in a survey of the educational performance of children attending elementary schools in the area, children (aged 9 to 13 years) performed very poorly on tests of intelligence, word recognition, and arithmetic (McGee, 1970, cited in Kellaghan, 1977b).

The preschool curriculum focused mainly on cognitive-scholastic objectives with the central objective of developing skills (e.g., perceptual discrimination, organization of knowledge, language) that would help the children to adapt to the subsequent work of the elementary school. Assisting the general social and personality development of the child was also a general objective of the curriculum and pervaded every aspect of the work.

Over a two-year period, groups of 15 children (aged 3 and 4 years) attended the preschool for either a morning or afternoon session of two and a half hours, under the supervision of a teacher and a classroom aide. A cooked meal was provided in the middle of the day, an aspect of the program that was unique in the school system and that proved to be an ideal forum for language and social training. Another feature of the program was the appointment of three social workers to work with families and to increase their awareness of the aims and functions of the school. A nursery nurse was also appointed to cater for children's physical needs.

An aspect of the project that was considered to be central to its success was the parent involvement component. Prior to each child's enrolment, teachers visited

homes and met mothers and other family members. During parent-teacher meetings that were held in the evenings, the importance of their involvement in their children's educational progress was emphasized and the educational program was explained in detail.

Children (particularly those whose initial achievements were low) made good progress in acquiring school-related knowledge and skills and in their ability to respond to verbal communication, their vocabulary, and their knowledge of numerical concepts. However, initial gains after two years of project participation were followed by a decline over the next three years so that mean IQ at age eight was about the same as children's score on entering the program (Kellaghan, 1977b). This finding is in keeping with findings from similar studies of the effects of early intervention programs in the United States. However, project participants did outperform children in a control group who had not been part of the program.

While in their early years in elementary school, the children failed to keep pace with the achievements of children in the general population, a follow-up study of the later educational careers, labor-market experiences, leisure activities, and social deviance of preschool program participants indicated that they, compared to non-participants from the same geographical area, stayed longer at school and were more likely to take a public examination. This was particularly true of girls (Kellaghan & Greaney, 1993).

Given the context of the present study, perhaps the most notable finding of the Rutland Street project related to the home environments of project children. After

intervention, the homes of these children received higher ratings on quality of language, opportunities for language development, guidance with school work, and the availability and use of facilities and materials related to school learning than the homes of children in the control group (Kellaghan, 1977b). Furthermore, parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with the preschool and identified similar positive attitudes among their children. A number of parents also reported several changes in their interactions with their children, notably that they read to their children on a more regular basis, that they had increased in the extent of verbal communication with their children, and that a small number of parents had learned new ways of teaching their children.

Another finding of the Rutland Street study was that, as would be expected within any group of children, the scholastic performance of the pupils varied widely (Kellaghan, 1977b). In considering problems of disadvantage, it is important to be mindful that, not only is there variance in the abilities and performance of a group of children living in an area so designated, but that the life experiences and conditions of the inhabitants also vary considerably. By replacing a measure of social class with a measure of home processes, Kellaghan (1977a) found “considerable variation” (p.758) in the homes of pupils categorized as disadvantaged.

An initiative for older students in disadvantaged areas is to be found in centers which house Youth Encounter Projects (YEPs). There are three such centers in the country. Set up in the late 1970s, YEPs are intended to provide educational experiences for a small number (25 to 30) of students, aged between 10 and 16 years,



who are unable to cope with the conditions of normal schools. Each center has the services of a full-time community worker who liaises with students' homes and maintains contact with students after they leave the center (Egan, 1984).

### Conclusion

The policies of successive Irish governments since the 1960s have been supportive of the principle of equality of educational opportunity. To this end, a number of educational initiatives to address the problems of social and economic disadvantage have been put in place over the years. These initiatives have, by and large, operated independently and in isolation from each other.

Research in Ireland and elsewhere has clearly established the relationships between home background factors and educational achievement and, specifically, the importance of parents' roles in children's learning. Both parents and children have been found to benefit from initiatives that emphasize the development of close ties between homes and schools.

## CHAPTER III

### THE HOME-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY LIAISON (HSCL) SCHEME

An overview of the aims and basic principles of the HSCL scheme is given in this chapter. The structures and personnel (National Steering Committee, National Coordinators, local coordinators, and local committees) through which the scheme operated are outlined. A description of criteria for selection of schools and of participating schools is given. Scheme supports are also described.

Experience with the provision of additional funding to schools in disadvantaged areas caused the Irish Department of Education to increase its resources for improving home-school relations. When in the 1990 budget, £1.5 million (a trebling of the 1989 allocation) was made available for elementary schools in disadvantaged areas, it was decided to use the money to support pilot Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) programs which would use school-based personnel to increase the involvement of parents in their children's education.

#### Aims of the HSCL Scheme

The aims of the HSCL scheme are:

1. To maximize active participation of the children in the scheme schools in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure.

2. To promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children.
3. To raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills.
4. To enhance the children's uptake from education, their retention in the educational system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their life-long attitudes to learning.
5. To disseminate the positive outcomes of the scheme throughout the school system generally.

### Basic Principles

The HSCL scheme is based on the principle of partnership between schools, homes, and communities. The idea of partnership that is considered central to the scheme is one that is also found in other approaches and is defined as “a working relationship that is characterized by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate. This implies a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision-making and accountability” (Pugh, 1989, p. 9).

In a document entitled Home/School/Community Liaison: Basic Principles (Ireland: Department of Education, 1993) the following principles governing the operation of the HSCL scheme were outlined:

1. The scheme consists of a partnership and collaboration of the complementary skills of parents and teachers.
2. The scheme is unified and integrated at both primary and post-primary levels.
3. The thrust of the scheme is preventative rather than curative.
4. The focus of the scheme is on the adults whose attitudes and behaviors impinge on the lives of children, namely, parents and teachers.
5. The basis of activities in the scheme is the identification of needs and having those needs met.
6. The development of teacher and staff attitudes in the areas of partnership and the "whole-school" approach.
7. The scheme promotes the fostering of self-help and independence.
8. Home visitation is a crucial element in establishing bonds of trust with families.
9. Networking with and promoting the coordination of the work of voluntary and statutory agencies increases effectiveness and obviates duplication.
10. Home/school/community liaison is a full-time undertaking (i.e., for the coordinator).
11. The liaison coordinator is an agent of change.
12. The promotion of community "ownership" of the scheme through development of local committees.

## Structure and Personnel

The HSCL scheme is designed to operate through the following structures and personnel: a National Steering Committee, a National Coordinator (and subsequently an assistant National Coordinator), local coordinators, and Local committees.

### National Steering Committee

A National Steering Committee was established “to advise on aims, objectives, and arrangements for the establishment and monitoring of the project” (Ireland: Department of Education, 1990). This committee was composed of representatives of government departments of education, health, and justice, the Irish National Teachers' Organization, the National Parents' Council, the Catholic Primary School Managers' Association, the Conference of Major Religious Superiors, and two representatives of national research institutes. The National Coordinator(s) and the evaluation director were also members of the committee.

### National Coordinator(s)

The responsibility of the National Coordinator as defined in An Explanatory Memorandum for Schools (Ireland: Department of Education, 1991) is:

to advise, support and animate the local coordinators and the Local committees, liaise with the local coordinators on an individual, local and school cluster basis and act as a liaison person between the cluster areas and the national steering committee of the pilot project.

Throughout the three years of the HSCL scheme, ongoing work of the National Coordinator (and subsequently the Assistant National Coordinator) as a support to coordinators included individual meetings with coordinators, principals, chairpersons of Boards of Management, and some parents and parent groups. The National Coordinators also attended cluster group and local committee meetings and assisted coordinators in setting up local committees in their areas. In meeting coordinators, the National Coordinators discussed current practice, needs, and fears of coordinators and provided encouragement and direction. This included how to: “establish and sustain programs; reach out to parents; develop the scheme in the local community; network; meet training needs for themselves; and plan and evaluate on a consistent cluster and personal level” (Conaty & Somers, 1993, p.7).

Work with principals was directed “towards the support of principals in developing a ‘whole school’ approach” (Conaty, 1992, p.11). It included discussion of principals' concerns about change and “beginning to develop participative policy formulation and democratic decision making” (p.11).

The National Coordinator made regular contacts with chairpersons of Boards of Management on an incidental basis and through meetings of local committees or related to the setting up of these committees.

Informal contacts were also made with teachers in staff rooms and with groups of parents. Some visits to parents' homes were occasionally made.

At the beginning of the third year of the scheme the National Coordinator initiated a sequence of learning experiences with newly appointed coordinators. These were as follows: “selection to attend inservice training; briefing and preparation which could include work experience in selected schools; becoming committed to learning; learning; preparation for the transfer of learning back in the work place; return to work; transfer of learning; ongoing support, monitoring and evaluating” (Conaty & Somers, 1993, p.38).

Throughout the year, the National Coordinator and Assistant National Coordinator held meetings with various individuals and groups involved in the HSCL scheme. An average of seven visits was made to individual coordinators, the range being from 3 to 13. When requested, additional visits were made by appointment. Work with individual coordinators followed the same general focus as during the second year, the main thrust being to listen to, support, and encourage coordinators and to share current practice. As the scheme was further extended, it was envisaged that this would continue on a less frequent basis, with additional support provided to coordinators who were experiencing difficulties.

During the third year, the National Coordinators met principals and chairpersons of Boards of Management, the emphasis of these meetings being similar to those of the previous year. There were also regular meetings with parent groups.

### Local Coordinators

According to an initial job description, the aim of each local coordinator was “to establish confidence, trust, mutual support and cooperation between parents and teachers, thereby enhancing perceptions and attitudes to the social, behavioral, and educational advantage of the children” (Ireland: Department of Education, 1990).

In An Explanatory Memorandum for Schools (Ireland: Department of Education, 1991) circulated to schools involved in the HSCL scheme, the “objective” of coordinators was stated as “to reinforce the aspect of cooperation between home, school, and community in the educative process.”

### Selection of Coordinators

During the first year of the scheme, there were three methods by which the 31 coordinators were chosen for the position. For almost half the appointments (n=14), school Boards of Management were in agreement with the recommendation of the National Coordinator. In eight instances, the school principal or two or more principals made a recommendation with which the Board of Management agreed. Finally, there were nine instances in which only one person applied for the position and was appointed.

During the second year of the scheme, 14 additional coordinators were appointed at elementary level. The National Coordinator met candidates for the position and made a recommendation about the appointment to the school Board of



Management of the schools in question. In most cases (n=11) this recommendation was accepted. In two cases there was only one applicant for the position.

### Assignment of Coordinators

The assignment of coordinators to schools varied. About half of the coordinators were appointed to serve a single school. Just over a third were assigned to serve two schools, generally in close proximity to each other, though this was not always the case. A third group of coordinators (n=4) was assigned to multiple schools (either 4 or 5) in Dublin city center. In this case, an attempt was made to group schools according to their proximity to each other and the coordinator was instructed to divide his/her time equally between the schools. These schools had lower enrollments than schools described above that were assigned a coordinator on a full- or half-time basis.

In the second year, the assignment of coordinators also varied. Four of the coordinators were appointed to serve a single school, eight were assigned to serve two schools, and the remaining two coordinators were assigned to serve a group of four schools in close proximity.

While schools which were identified as exhibiting a high level of activity in the first year of the scheme were as likely to be associated with a coordinator who had responsibility for more than one school as with a coordinator who was responsible for only one school, at the same time difficulties were experienced in serving two or more

schools. These arose particularly from time constraints that affected visiting homes, attending meetings, and meeting with staff of more than one school. There were also increased demands in terms of planning for more than one school and in being accountable to several principals and staffs, sometimes resulting in resentment between schools if a coordinator was perceived to be spending more time or energy in one than in another. Coordinators were also expected to report on their work to each principal on a school basis rather than on their work as a whole.

Further practical difficulties included the necessity to delegate responsibility for sending notes about activities (since the coordinator might not be in the school on the relevant day), the need to reach several catchment areas and different families, and to carry materials from place to place, or the fact that contact with one's own staff group was diminished. Coordinators also found that parents became confused about the days or times that they were in the school and frustrated when the coordinator was not available. They also often experienced difficulty in following up on a problem when time was lost in taking action.

However, there were also some advantages in serving more than one school. One such advantage occurred when the schools involved were junior and senior schools serving the same families. Since it is easier to reach parents through a junior school, this facilitated work within the senior school. Coordinators also found that when they served more than one school they had a broader contact group to call on (parents, staff, principals, etc.) and that their work resulted in increased

communication between the staffs of different schools. Again, when serving more than one school, if the schools were in one area, the coordinator tended to think more in terms of an area than in terms of a school and this resulted in more integration of activities. Coordinators also used positive experiences gained in one school to work through difficulties in another and, in some instances, staff from one school assisted in establishing activities (e.g., paired reading) in another.

In the first year of the scheme enrollment was a factor in deciding whether a coordinator should serve one or more schools. Since some schools had quite small enrollments, this criterion seemed appropriate. In subsequent assignments of coordinators, to address problems experienced at an earlier stage, the proximity of schools and their location were also considered. The optimum arrangement would seem to be that a coordinator would serve no more than two centers.

### Local Committees

The underlying philosophy of the HSCL scheme has been that programs should be directly related to the needs of the area in which they are located. A representative local committee was identified as one source for determining the focus of programs as well as being a forum for communication between parents, school staff, and members of community agencies. During the initial stages of the scheme, precise details about the nature and composition of local committees were left for decision to the National Steering Committee. Following discussion of the National Steering Committee and

based on the experience at local level, it was decided that a local committee, representing the three groups, home, school, and community, would be established “in each project area.” In some instances, a local committee may represent a small number of schools serving a defined geographical area while, in others, it may serve a wider area. The balance of membership should be divided equally between parents and representatives of voluntary and statutory agencies or services in the community.

The purposes of the local committee were outlined as follows:

1. To help coordinate the work of the various agencies in the area towards the purpose of developing home/school/community links.
2. To enable parents as a group to have an input into the development of the project in their own area.
3. To receive reports from the local coordinator and to advise her/him of specific community needs.
4. To support the local coordinator as an important home/school/community resource.
5. To identify a group which would generate acceptance and support for new ideas and strategies.
6. To ensure greater community “ownership” of the project and wider community support for it.
7. To participate in the ongoing evaluation of the various aspects of the project in its own area.

8. To liaise with the National Steering Committee through the National Coordinator.
9. To set targets for partnership in the project in cooperation with local schools.
10. To comply with overall policy guidelines from the National Steering Committee.

### Participating Elementary Schools

All of the schools in the HSCL scheme are part of the Department of Education Scheme of Assistance for Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage. The criteria upon which such designation is based are as follows:

1. The proportion of pupils at entry grade in the school whose families reside in local authority housing (300 points).
2. The proportion of pupils at entry grade whose families are entitled to free medical services (hold a medical card) (200 points).
3. The proportion of pupils at entry grade whose parent(s) are in receipt of unemployment benefit or assistance (400 points).

Provision is made for a rating based on a judgment by a school inspector (100 points) to be included in the calculation of an aggregate score from the above.

Since 1984, schools that are designated as disadvantaged receive a grant to provide additional resources in the form of books and materials (£10 per pupil -

approximately \$16) and a home-school-community liaison program (£5 per pupil - approximately \$8). Some schools are also assigned one or more additional teachers.

Schools designated as disadvantaged in seven urban areas--five in Dublin, one in Cork, and one in Limerick--were invited by the Department of Education through the chairpersons of their Boards of Management to participate in the HSCL scheme. Provision was made for 30 posts of home-school-community liaison coordinators to be filled in the first year of the scheme by teachers seconded from their teaching posts for a three-year period. In all, 55 out of the 190 schools which were in the Department's disadvantaged schools scheme at the time became involved in the HSCL scheme. There were 18,600 children in the 55 schools (52,000 in the 190 schools). Towards the end of the school year, one further school was officially admitted to the scheme, bringing the total number of schools to 56 and the total number of home-school-community liaison coordinators to 31.

A further 24 schools (including schools from new areas in Galway and Waterford) entered the scheme in the second year bringing the total number of schools to 80 and the total number of coordinators to 45. During the course of the year, one of the schools that had entered the scheme in the first year withdrew.

No additional elementary schools entered the HSCL scheme in the third year.

As part of the HSCL scheme, schools were allocated a teacher to replace the staff member who was appointed as coordinator. Additional resources were also allocated to each school.

Criteria for selection of schools to be included in the HSCL scheme were not described.

### Support for the Scheme

Apart from the input of the National and Assistant National Coordinators (as outlined above), other sources of support for the HSCL scheme were inservice courses (for coordinators, principals, inspectors, and to a lesser extent, teachers) and cluster groups. In the third year of the scheme, staff development sessions were conducted in some schools.

#### Inservice Courses for Coordinators

Inservice provision for coordinators is described in detail in the National Coordinators' Annual Report for 1992-93. In undergoing a systematic process since the inception of the scheme, coordinators have been exposed to processes designed to develop a range of attitudes, concepts, and skills for their work.

The skills involved relate to both personal and professional development. Personal qualities which were targeted included improved self-esteem, the ability to make decisions, to delegate responsibility, and to begin a process of empowering those around them, as well as coping with negative attitudes of others and overcoming hindrances in their work. Coordinators were encouraged to influence teachers and parents as much as possible by being examples of these attributes.

Aspects of professional skills that were the focus of courses for coordinators included the ability to identify needs in collaboration with people in the community and to tailor programs, as far as possible, to meet these needs. Coordinators were encouraged to listen to each other and to everybody with whom they have contact. Closely related to this is the notion of developing trust and openness within groups so that discussions can be of optimal benefit to HSCL programs.

Coordinators have continually been encouraged and reminded to focus their attention on the causes of problems rather than on the immediate symptoms (though, in certain circumstances the latter may be necessary). Leadership skills have also been emphasized in individual coordinators, as well as the ability to identify and develop leaders within the community. Coordinators have also been encouraged to establish links with as many other individuals and agencies as possible in the community. This should enable them to avail of as many services and resources (including information) as possible, to direct parents to appropriate services, and to avoid duplication of services. Finally, coordinators have been encouraged to plan, monitor, and evaluate their work on an ongoing basis and support for this has been available through the National Coordinators and cluster groups.

#### Inservice Courses for Principals and Inspectors

Throughout the three years of the scheme, a one-day seminar for principals and inspectors was held at the beginning of the school year in which their school entered



the scheme. The purpose was “to inform principals about the background to, and activities involved in, the HSCL scheme.” The following issues were discussed during the seminar: a rationale for the clustering of schools; objectives of the HSCL scheme; the role of principals, inspectors, local coordinators, Local committees, evaluator, and other agencies (e.g., community) in the scheme; difficulties for principals; implications of the scheme for school personnel; group work to identify and air perceptions of their own role and contributions to the program; concerns to be communicated to other specified parties (i.e., local coordinators, Department of Education, evaluator), and further assistance they might need. Similar one-day seminars were held throughout the three years of the scheme.

#### Inservice Courses for Teachers

Summer courses of one week were run in two locations during July and August of the first year of the scheme as part of the general summer inservice program for all elementary teachers. The courses were staffed by a Department of Education inspector on the National Steering Committee, the National Coordinator, and three local coordinators. Teachers who attended were not necessarily from schools in the HSCL scheme. Similar courses were held in subsequent years other locations.

### Cluster Groups

As a response to coordinators' expressed need for ongoing communication and discussion of ideas and difficulties, it was decided that cluster groups would be established in the second year of the scheme. Each cluster group consisted of all coordinators serving schools in a specific area of the city in which they were located. During the second year, meetings were held in September, October, December, and in May-June, the main purpose being to consolidate inservice training and the National Coordinator's work with individual coordinators.

In response to coordinators' suggestions about cluster group meetings, changes were made in the format of same and some procedural aspects were specified. Meetings were held each month from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on a designated day and an agenda and minutes of the previous meeting were circulated in advance.

The meetings included aspects of review, evaluation, and planning, as well as sharing of current good practice and discussion of difficulties. Each meeting also had an inservice component prepared by one or more of the coordinators. The meetings also provided an opportunity for sub-groups of coordinators (e.g., those serving the same families) to work together. One of the National Coordinators also attended the meetings.

### Staff Development Sessions

A new feature of the scheme during third year was the provision, by the National Coordinator, of staff development sessions in 72 elementary schools.

The staff sessions began with small group discussions of benefits of the scheme to date, staff expectations for HSCL, and their fears about partnership with parents (Conaty & Somers, 1993). The National Coordinator addressed these issues and outlined the rationale of the scheme and the role of the coordinator. In most schools, a group of three parents, who had not been active in the school prior to the HSCL scheme, outlined their fears of school and of teachers based on their own experience of school. They also described how, as a result of their involvement in HSCL activities, they had increased their confidence and changed the way they relate to their children. In subsequent years, it was envisaged by the National Coordinator that developmental sessions with staff would be provided for schools who requested them.

### Conclusion

The HSCL scheme was established to increase the involvement of parents in their children's education. Schools in areas designated as disadvantaged were targeted for the intervention.

The scheme was directed by a National Coordinator and, subsequently, an assistant to her, who worked closely with local coordinators at school level.

Inservice courses and meetings with coordinators, principals and inspectors, and school staff were provided as support for the implementation of the scheme. The National Steering Committee, comprised of representatives of various stakeholder groups, was established to advise on all aspects of the HSCL scheme, including the evaluation. At local level, local committees whose membership was made up of parents and representatives of community agencies and individuals were intended to determine program focus based on identified needs.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **EVALUATION PROCEDURES**

#### **Overview and Purposes of the Evaluation**

Evaluation was perceived to be an integral part of the HSCL scheme and was expected to perform formative and summative functions so that findings could be of benefit to the ongoing development of the scheme. It was within the brief of the National Steering Committee to discuss and have input to the evaluation at all stages of the work. This meant that all stakeholders at national level were involved in the planning of the evaluation and received regular reports on scheme developments. The evaluation was also explained in detail to the local coordinators and to school principals.

The major purposes of the evaluation were: (a) to examine how the HSCL scheme was constructed and implemented (in each school); and (b) to monitor specified outcomes of HSCL activity.

#### **Evaluation Audiences**

The primary audiences for formative evaluation reports were members of the National Steering Committee and senior management personnel in the Department of

Education. Reports were presented in verbal and written formats, approximately every two months to the National Steering Committee. Long reports that required time to review were circulated in written form before the meeting so that Committee members could present their reactions during the meeting. Otherwise, reports were presented on the day of the meeting and a written copy was provided to Committee members. On a few occasions where the information was deemed to be useful to them, reports were also sent to coordinators in participating schools.

Audiences for the summative evaluation reports included members of the National Steering Committee and senior management personnel responsible for policy formulation in the Departments of Education and Finance. These reports were issued on an annual basis. Department personnel responsible for the management of the scheme and the National Co-Coordinator reviewed the reports for clarity and accuracy in advance of circulation to the Committee.

During the third year of the scheme, prior to taking decisions about the long-term future of the HSCL scheme, the Department of Education requested an interim evaluation report that addressed specific issues related to the decisions to be made (e.g., extension of the scheme, characteristics of coordinators, coordinator's service, role of coordinators, assignment of coordinators to schools, local committees, inservice). The evaluators and the Department personnel worked together to identify these issues and to decide on the best procedures to obtain the necessary information.

The report that ensued was then provided on a confidential basis to the Department of Education to facilitate their decision-making process.

Throughout the course of the evaluation, control over release of evaluation reports was held solely by the Department of Education. Editing of reports was controlled by the evaluators. While every effort was made to incorporate suggestions and views of the Steering Committee and Department personnel, this was done only to the extent that it did not compromise the evaluation findings. To ensure as far as possible that this was the case, the evaluation manager discussed such decisions with the director of the Educational Research Center and with members of the evaluation team.

### Evaluators

The evaluation was conducted over a three-year period by the Educational Research Center, a national center for educational research for almost thirty years. The evaluation director had training in evaluation and research methodologies, as well as previous experience in conducting evaluations. A research assistant was assigned to work full time on tasks as assigned by the evaluation director. Where relevant, staff from the Educational Research Center provided input and assistance (e.g., advice regarding sampling, data analysis, data entry). Regular discussions of progress and planning were held with the director of the center who was also a member of the National Steering Committee.

### Political Viability of the Evaluation

Political viability of both the HSCL scheme in general and of the scheme evaluation was ensured through representation of the various stakeholder groups (i.e., school managers, teachers, parents, representatives of relevant government departments, and some individuals with experience of research on disadvantage) on the National Steering Committee. This provided a forum for discussion of ideas and also a structure through which the input of various groups could be sought as required throughout the development of the scheme.

A further aspect of the evaluation that strengthened its political viability was the explanation of the evaluation to all stakeholders, including those at school level, at the outset. Furthermore, principals, coordinators, and teachers had the opportunity to provide feedback on an ongoing basis.

Finally, the system of ongoing reporting that occurred through the forum of the National Steering Committee ensured that all parties were aware of the main evaluation findings prior to the release of the final evaluation report.

### Evaluation Criteria and Procedures

One of the criteria used to assess the success of the HSCL scheme was the scheme aims (outlined in Chapter III). Given the broad nature of the aims, and the fact that many of the effects would, by definition be long-term, it was difficult to



identify measures that were sensitive to program effects that met the aims. To determine the extent to which the aims “To maximize active participation of children in the scheme schools in the learning process” or “To raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children’s educational progress” were accomplished was, by its nature, problematic. Comments on this aspect of the evaluation are provided in Chapter XI.

One example of the collection of evaluation information to address the scheme aims relates to the second aim which is: “To promote active cooperation between, home, school, and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children.” In order to assess this, a measure of the policy and practice in schools in relation to home-school communications and parent involvement was provided by the school principal at the school’s inception to the scheme. Based on reports from coordinators about HSCL activities in the schools, it was possible to determine, to some extent, the changes that had taken place in schools.

A further difficulty in identifying criteria or standards against which to measure the effectiveness of the scheme was the fact that the HSCL scheme was such a new departure in the Irish school system that there was no previous experience on which to build. Furthermore, at the outset, the scheme was defined in general terms and coordinators were given a very broad assignment and advised to respond to the needs they and parents identified at local level. No single model or approach was to be followed and the scheme evolved over the course of the evaluation. It was difficult

therefore to predict the precise form that scheme activities would take and variance between sites was to be expected.

It was for these reasons that the evaluation focused on monitoring and documenting scheme developments and issues related to implementation. This was facilitated by involving local coordinators in an ongoing process of providing progress records, with details of activities at school level. Furthermore, by establishing a rapport with individual coordinators and principals and by encouraging them to be frank in their discussions of the scheme, it was hoped to identify the positive and negative aspects of scheme development. A practice of maintaining the strictest confidentiality was crucial to this effort.

Another approach to assessing scheme effectiveness was in relation to implementation issues that were identified from the input of the various stakeholders, particularly at local level. The issues were built into the information collection process (i.e., interviews, site visits, progress records) and were thus addressed throughout the three years of the evaluation.

#### Evaluation Methods: Year One

Methods in the evaluation included questionnaires, interviews, site visits, and assessment of pupils. Since the scheme was evolving during the period of evaluation (including the introduction of additional schools), it was necessary that the evaluation procedures be flexible enough to adapt to ongoing information needs. The original

plan to conduct an in-depth study of ten schools was reduced to six in response to the scheme extension and the limitation of resources for evaluation.

This section describes the instruments and approaches for data collection during the first year of the evaluation. These included the School Profile, Progress Record, and interviews conducted with coordinators, principals, teachers, and parents during site visits to schools. The focus, form, respondents, and frequency of administration of each instrument and approach are described as well as the issues addressed. Copies of the instruments are on file at the Educational Research Center and may be obtained from the author at cost.

### School Profile

The focus of the School Profile was to document school policy and practice regarding parent involvement prior to the introduction of the HSCL scheme. The School Profile took the form of a questionnaire that was completed by principals at their school's inception to the HSCL scheme. The issues addressed in the School Profile are described below.

### School-Parent Communication

Principals were asked to describe information sent to parents about the school; parent-teacher meetings (frequency, purpose, level of attendance, possible reasons for

non-attendance); frequency of reports on pupil work/behavior; arrangements for parent contact with the principal; and teacher visits to homes (frequency, purpose).

#### Parent Involvement in School

Issues addressed include: parent attendance at school activities (frequency, purpose, level of attendance); parent involvement with teachers in school activities (type of activities, level of attendance); availability of a parents' room; and structures for parent involvement in school governance.

#### General

Principals were asked questions about general issues such as: pupil attendance levels; numbers of pupils enrolled in the school; teacher involvement in extra-curricular activities with pupils.

#### Progress Record

The focus of the Progress Record was to gather information about the implementation of the HSCL scheme. In the first year, the Progress Record, in the form of a questionnaire was completed by coordinators on a bi-monthly basis. The issues addressed in the bi-monthly Progress Record are described below.

### Contacts and Communication

This aspect covered contacts/communication with parents in the school (individually/in groups, nature, frequency, purpose, outcome) and in the community (frequency, outcomes, comments on contacts); with teachers (individually/in groups, nature, frequency, purpose, outcome); with the school principal (frequency, purposes, outcomes, comments on contacts); with pupils (individually/in groups/with parent(s), nature, frequency, purpose, outcome); and with community agencies (voluntary and statutory) and individuals (nature, frequency, outcome).

### Parent Involvement Activities

Coordinators provided descriptions of activities in the school (nature, attendance, steps to improve attendance, difficulties) as well as their visits to activities in the local community, e.g., local clubs or groups (nature, frequency, outcomes).

### Home Visits

Coordinators provided details of the number (approximate) of homes visited, their criteria for targeting homes, the purposes of their visits, and the outcomes.

### General

In this section of the Progress Record, coordinators described difficulties encountered, possible causes of these difficulties, and the measures they took to address them. They also provided details of additional activities that were not already covered by the Progress Record. Finally, they described their meetings with other coordinators (frequency, advantages, expectations), and added general comments.

### Site Visits and Interviews

Each school (n=56) in the HSCL scheme was visited once during the first year of the scheme. The evaluation manager and the other member of the evaluation team each visited half of the schools. No particular criteria were applied in the allocation of schools between the two persons. During these site visits, the two main areas of focus were the integration of the scheme into school practice and stakeholder reactions and expectations. Interviews were conducted with coordinators, principals, teachers, and, where possible, a group of parents. The issues addressed are outlined below.

### Coordinators

Coordinators were asked to describe their perceptions of the objectives for the HSCL program (at school and classroom level). They were also asked to discuss issues or problems that they felt were left unaddressed by the HSCL program, to provide their opinions on the overall strengths and weaknesses of the HSCL program,

both at local level and in the context of the educational system in general.

Coordinators were also asked to provide suggestions for improving the program.

### Principals

Principals were asked to address the same issues as those for coordinators described above. In addition, they were asked to comment on whether or not they had experienced any changes in their role as principal as a result of the HSCL program, and, if so, to describe those changes.

### Teachers

To supplement information gathered from principals in the School Profile, teachers were asked to describe practices relating to parent involvement prior to the introduction of the HSCL scheme. The issues included were: parent involvement in school-based activities; the availability of a parents' room in the school; and teacher interaction with parents in general; descriptions of channels for parent-teacher communication about pupil progress and behavior (e.g., homework notebooks, written reports, parent-teacher meetings, home visits by teachers). Teachers were also asked about aspects of the HSCL program as outlined for coordinators and principals above, including a question about a change in their role.

### Parents

Due to time constraints, it was not feasible to meet parent groups in every school and so this occurred at random, i.e., where a parent group was meeting on the day of the evaluator's visit. The issues addressed in interviews with parents are described below.

Parents were asked to describe aspects of school-parent communication in the school. These included: communication to parents about the school (nature, purpose); parent-teacher meetings (frequency, purpose); reports on pupil work/behavior (frequency, outcome); informal contacts with teachers (meetings and homework notebooks, and their perception of the level of importance of these); arrangements for parent contact with the principal; and teacher visits to homes (frequency, purpose).

Parents were also asked to describe aspects of parent involvement in the school prior to the introduction of the HSCL scheme, including parent attendance at school activities (frequency, nature); availability of a parents' room; teacher and principal involvement with parents in activities in parents' room (nature, number of teachers); and structures for parent involvement in school governance.

Finally, parents were asked about the HSCL program in their child's school. They were asked about their attitudes to HSCL, what they considered to be the advantages and disadvantages of the scheme in general and of the program at school level, problems of parents in relation to HSCL and to becoming involved in the



school, changes in parent activities in the school as a result of HSCL, and their suggestions as to how the scheme and program could be improved.

### **Evaluation Methods: Year Two**

This section describes the instruments and approaches for data collection during the second year of the evaluation. These included the School Profile (for the 24 schools that joined the scheme in the second year), Progress Record, and interviews conducted with coordinators, principals, teachers, and pupils during site visits to six selected schools (details of the selection method are provided later in this chapter). The instruments and approaches are described in terms of the focus, form, respondents, frequency of administration, and issues addressed for each. Copies of the instruments are on file at the Educational Research Center and may be obtained from the author at cost.

#### **Progress Record**

With the extension of the scheme during the second year, the bi-monthly Progress Record was completed only by coordinators serving six selected schools (described later in this chapter). The Progress Record was adapted to an Annual Progress Record that was completed once during the year by coordinators serving all other schools. The issues addressed are described below.

### Program Implementation and Assessment at School Level

Coordinators were asked to describe the main purpose of the HSCL program in their school(s) and the three activities that took most of their time. In addition, they were asked to give their overall rating of program success on a scale from 1 (very successful) to 4 (unsuccessful) and reasons for the rating. Coordinators were also asked to describe the advantages of the program, difficulties posed by it, and suggestions for improvement.

### Parent Involvement in the School

Coordinators provided descriptions of courses and activities for parents (including the nature of courses and activities, the number of parents (approximately) who attended, male/female breakdown of parents who attended) and parent involvement in leadership roles in the school (nature of the activity and number of parents).

### Home Visits

Coordinators were asked to describe the purposes of their visits to homes, the difficulties they encountered, and their assessment of the importance of home visits to their role as coordinator.

### Local Committee

Coordinators were asked whether or not a local committee had been established for their school(s). They were also asked to rate (on a scale from 1 “to a great extent” to 3 “not at all”) the extent to which the local committee served as a vehicle for parent input to the HSCL program and to give reasons for their rating.

### Community Involvement

Coordinators were asked to list the three agencies or individuals in the local community with whom they had most contact during the year and to describe the nature and extent of the influence of these agencies or individuals on the program.

### Perceived Changes In Attitudes And Practice

Coordinators rated their perceptions (on a scale from 1 “much more positive” to 5 “much more negative”) of changes in the attitudes of parents and teachers towards parent involvement in the school since the inception of the HSCL scheme. They also described their perceptions of changes that had occurred in homes and in the school as a result of the program.

### Six Selected Schools

At the end of the first year of the scheme, six schools were selected for more detailed study. The coordinators serving these schools completed the bi-monthly

Progress Record that was used during the first year (described in the preceding section). During site visits to schools, coordinators, principals, teachers, and pupils were interviewed. In addition, achievement testing of pupils was carried out.

### Site Visits and Interviews

The purpose of the first visit to schools was to explain to principals and coordinators the reasons for the selection of the school, to discuss the proposed evaluation activities for the year, and to respond to any of their questions or concerns about aspects of the evaluation.

During the second visit, the main purpose was to obtain measures of pupils' (first, third, and fifth grade) achievements in mathematics and reading. At this time, an effort was also made to establish contacts with school staff, and to respond to questions about the evaluation.

The third visit to schools was of two days duration and its purpose was to conduct interviews with coordinators, principals, teachers, and pupils. The focus of the interviews was the integration of the HSCL scheme into school practice, stakeholder reactions, and expectations. Specific issues addressed with each group of respondents are described below.

Coordinators. Coordinators were asked to describe the focus of the HSCL program. This included any change in focus that had occurred, the origin of the

activities, how they had determined the needs in the area, and other influences on the program.

Coordinators gave information regarding the involvement of parents. This included details about level of involvement, an estimate of the proportion of families in need that they had reached, recruitment of parents for involvement, the issue of the development of parent “cliques,” and the kinds of parents who had not become involved.

In relation to home visits, coordinators described the purposes of their visits, their means of selecting which homes to visit, and their perceptions of the importance of the visits to their role as coordinator.

The issues addressed in regard to local committees included whether these had been established and the extent to which they served as a vehicle for parent input to the program.

Coordinators described the local agencies or individuals that they had contacted and the influence of these agencies or individuals on the HSCL program. They also described any support for “educational” activities that had been provided as a result of these contacts.

Specific changes at school level that were described include: changes to facilitate parent involvement (frequency and nature of use of parents' room; availability of other school facilities; openness of school to parents); changes to facilitate HSCL work (room/office available for coordinator; availability of other

school facilities; impact on work); changes to facilitate communication with school staff; changes in teachers' attitudes and practices (willingness to involve parents in classrooms).

Coordinators were asked to express the degree of their satisfaction with inservice provision. They were also asked about their needs for further guidance and training and to give their suggestions for inservice provision for new coordinators.

A final issue related to coordinators who served multiple (i.e., more than two) schools. They were asked about the impact on their work of: relationships between schools and principals; distance between schools; and type of school (i.e., whether the school served only the four junior grades, only the four senior grades, or all eight grades).

Principals. Principals were asked about their perceptions of the aims of the HSCL program, as well as their opinions as to whether or not these aims were being met and reasons for their assessment. They were also asked about the decision-making process in relation to HSCL activities, the role of the coordinator in the school, issues or problems unaddressed by HSCL, strengths and weaknesses of the HSCL program, their suggestions for improving the program; and other comments.

Principals were asked about their involvement in and support for the HSCL program in relation to the initiation of activities, meetings with the coordinator (frequency, nature, purpose, suggestions for improvement), changes in their role as

principal, involvement in school-based activities with parents, and their willingness to become involved in such activities.

Principals were asked about their perceptions of the role of the local committee and to describe that role in terms of the following: input from committee members; the committees as a vehicle for parent input; as a means of coordination of the activities of local agencies; committee effectiveness; and difficulties.

Information about principals' attitudes to and their perceptions of parent involvement included the following: the value of parent involvement to the school; kind of parent likely to get involved; and willingness of teachers to involve parents.

Principals were asked to describe the following effects of HSCL on the school: contribution of the coordinator; changes in the school to facilitate HSCL; changes in teachers' attitudes towards HSCL; proportion of needy families being reached; other activities required; and the extent to which needs were being met in the school.

Teachers. All of the teachers in each school were interviewed. They were asked the same questions as principals in relation to their knowledge and perceptions of the scheme, their attitudes to and perceptions of parent involvement, and effects of the HSCL program in the school and of the scheme at a general level.

In relation to their own involvement, teachers were asked about their role in initiating activities, their meetings with the coordinator (frequency, nature, purpose, suggestions for improvement), changes in their role, their involvement in school-based

activities and classroom-based activities with parents, their willingness to become involved and the conditions they would attach to such involvement.

Pupils. A sample of fifth grade pupils (three from each class) was interviewed in each school. Pupils were interviewed in groups of three. The purpose of the interview was explained to the class teachers and teachers were asked to select pupils that would not be intimidated by the interview process. It was stressed to them that a pupil's scholastic ability was not directly relevant to the selection process.

Pupils were asked about their knowledge of HSCL activities, their knowledge of the involvement of their own parents, and their attitudes to parent involvement at school level and at classroom level.

### Achievement Testing

The purpose of the achievement testing was to obtain baseline achievement data for pupils in HSCL schools. Achievement tests in mathematics and reading were administered to pupils in first, third, and fifth grades. Details of the tests and of the results are presented in Chapter X.

### Mothers' Interview

At the end of the second year of the scheme, a sample of mothers' of pupils in the six selected schools was interviewed. Details of the interview and analyses of



results are provided in Chapter IX. Further analyses of the relationships between selected mothers' characteristics and pupil achievements are described in Chapter X.

### Evaluation Methods: Year Three

#### Annual Progress Record

All coordinators completed an Annual Progress Record at the end of the final year of the scheme. Once again, the focus was implementation of the HSCL scheme. The issues were similar to those addressed in the previous year, with some additions that were relevant to the summative evaluation, and are described below.

#### Program Implementation and Assessment at School Level

Coordinators were asked to describe the main purpose of the program and their allocation of time to various activities. They also provided an overall rating of program success (on a scale from 1 "very successful" to 4 "unsuccessful"), described the extent to which various factors affected program success, difficulties in their work, and suggestions for improving the program.

#### Parent Involvement

Coordinators outlined courses and activities for parents (nature, number of parents, number of new parents), parent involvement at school and classroom level (nature of involvement), and parent visits to the school.

### Home Visits

The purposes of home visits and their importance to the success of the HSCL program were described. Coordinators also assessed the adequacy of the amount of time they spent on home visits. They gave information about the proportion of visits requested by the school principal and teachers. Finally, they described the contribution of home visits as a support for families, for children, for teachers and as a means of recruiting parents.

### Local Committee

Coordinators were asked whether a local committee had been established. They rated the effectiveness of the local committee (on a scale from 1 “very effective” to 4 “ineffective”) in directing the HSCL program. They also described the influence of various factors on committee success (principal support, management support, teacher awareness of HSCL, parent awareness of HSCL, committee functioning, member cooperation).

### Community Involvement

Coordinators described the community agencies and individuals contacted, the purposes of the contacts, and the extent of their contribution to program success. They also assessed the adequacy of the amount of their time devoted to community contacts.

### **Perceived Changes in Schools**

Descriptions about changes in schools provided by coordinators related to school structures, school organization, staff relationships and changes in the school's role in the community.

### **Perceived Changes in Teacher Practices and Attitudes**

Coordinators described teacher interactions with parents, involvement of parents in classrooms, and the involvement of teachers in HSCL. They also rated changes in teachers' attitudes (on a scale from 1 "much more positive" to 5 "much more negative") and described their observations regarding teachers' attitudes and the nature of same (more tolerant of parents in school; more aware of parents' role and contribution at home and in school; more positive about parents' role and contribution at home and in school; more aware of the coordinator as a resource; more aware of the aims and nature of the HSCL program.

### **Perceived Changes in Parent Practices and Attitudes**

Coordinators described their perceptions of changes in parent practices and attitudes. Issues addressed include parent involvement in children's schoolwork, parenting skills, coping skills, home management skills, parents' awareness of their contribution to children's learning, parents' awareness of the coordinator as a resource, and parents' interest in school. Coordinators also rated changes in parents'

attitudes to the HSCL program in the school (on a scale from 1 “much more positive” to 5 “much more negative”).

### Perceived Changes in Pupil Practices and Attitudes

Coordinators were asked to describe their perceptions of changes in pupil behavior, attendance, attitudes to school, attitudes to parents, pride in their work, increased practical help with work, and school achievement.

### Six Selected Schools

In the third year of the scheme, coordinators in the six selected schools completed the bi-monthly Progress Record as for the two previous years. They also completed the Annual Progress Record at the end of the third year. During visits to schools, interviews were conducted with coordinators and principals. The focus of these interviews was the overall development of the scheme and the effects of HSCL programs at school level. The issues addressed are described below.

### Coordinators

Coordinators were asked to describe parent involvement in courses and activities (nature of the course or activity; how the need was assessed; source of funding; source of tutor; duration of the course or activity; number of parents

involved; kind of parent involved; level of involvement; the development of a core group of parents; the number of new parents; and steps they took to reach parents).

In relation to the school-home relationships, coordinators were asked to describe parents' sense of "belonging" in school and steps taken to promote this. They were also asked to assess the extent to which two-way communication existed and to outline the channels of communication that existed.

Coordinators described how the role of the local committee had developed over the three years, the extent to which the committee served as a vehicle for parent input, and as a means to establish links with other agencies in the area.

The purposes of coordinator's home visits were described, as well as the homes targeted by them. Coordinators also described the importance of home visits to their role as coordinator.

Changes at school level were described in terms of changes: to facilitate coordinator communication (with the principal, staff group, individual teachers); to facilitate ongoing teacher development about HSCL (nature; number of staff); in teachers' attitudes to parent involvement (perceived attitudes; changes in attitude). Coordinators were asked to describe the most obvious effects of HSCL in the school.

Contacts with local agencies and individuals (purpose and nature) were described and the influence of these contacts on the program was noted.

Coordinators also provided information on general issues related to HSCL. These included: the role of the coordinator and how it had developed as well as how it

fitted with existing roles both within and outside the school; efforts to build common bonds between schools, homes, and the community (sharing in decision-making); efforts to reach agreement on goals, ideals, aspirations; the relationship with HSCL programs in other schools.

### Principals

Principals were asked to provide information about aspects of school-home relationships and specifically, about the extent to which two-way communication existed and the channels for this.

In relation to the local committee, principals were asked to describe how the role had developed, the extent to which the committee served as a vehicle for parent input to the HSCL program, and as a means of establishing links with other agencies in the area.

Principals were asked to describe the nature of their own involvement in HSCL and any changes in their role that occurred as a result of the program.

Principals described changes at school level in terms of the following changes: to facilitate communication between the coordinator and the principal, the staff group, and individual teachers; to facilitate ongoing teacher development about HSCL (nature; number of staff); and changes in teachers' attitudes to parent involvement (perceived attitudes; changes in attitude).

Principals were asked about the impact of the HSCL program on each of the following within the school: school programs or curricula; allocation of resources or services; access for parents to the school. They were also asked to describe the most obvious effects of HSCL in the school.

General issues relating to HSCL that were discussed with principals included the development of the role of coordinator and how it fitted with existing roles within the school and outside the school. They were also asked to describe any efforts that had been made to build common bonds between schools, homes, and the community and about efforts to reach agreement on goals, ideals, and aspirations. Finally, principals commented on the relationship of the HSCL program in their school to programs in other schools.

#### Selection Process for Selection of Six Schools for Further Study

As noted above, information on the functioning of programs in their first year was obtained for all schools in the scheme in Progress Records completed by coordinators as well as during interviews with coordinators and principals (as described earlier in this chapter). As also noted, the addition of extra schools to the scheme in the second year meant that it was not possible to continue to carry out evaluation activities in all schools on the same scale as in the first year of the scheme. Hence it was decided to continue to collect some limited information from all schools and to select six schools which would continue to be subject to more intense

investigation. An analysis of the activities of schools in their first year was used to guide the selection of the six schools.

For the analysis, the number of separate activities in which each school had engaged (as recorded in any of the above sources) in the first year of the scheme was calculated. Activities ranged from informal contacts with parents (e.g., chatting to them on the street) to formal training sessions designed to enable parents work with a teacher in the classroom. In all, 369 separate activities were identified. These activities were categorized according to Epstein's (1987) six types of family-community-school collaboration under which 90 variables were identified. These were then condensed into 25 categories (e.g., written communication from school to home, home visits about specific problems, parent attendance at school activities, coordinator visits to local agencies, parent involvement in school Board of Management) which then were further reduced to three categories.

In establishing the final three categories, learning and teaching activities were regarded as the focal point of the categorization. The first category was described as proximal and an activity was assigned to it if it was closely related to the teaching-learning situation (e.g., parents involved in classroom activities, educational activities being carried out in the home). The second category was called intermediate and an activity was assigned to it if it was related to home-school communication or activities, or parenting courses (e.g., written and oral communication from school to home, talks to promote self-development, or parenting skills). The final category was called distal



and an activity was assigned to it if it was related to parent involvement at the level of school governance or support (e.g., membership of a parents' committee) or to school/coordinator involvement in the wider community (e.g., contact with community agencies). Each school was assigned a score for proximal activities, a score for intermediate activities, and a score for distal activities.

Analyses were carried out to determine if any distinctive patterns were discernible in the way in which schools had constructed their HSCL programs. (These analyses were carried out by Ronan Reilly at the Educational Research Center.) Because the proximal, intermediate, and distal measures or scales comprised a different number of items, the measures were normalized to permit comparisons between them. This was accomplished by first summing the items making up each scale. Following this, the lowest of the range of school values was subtracted from the school's raw score which was then divided by the range. For each scale, this gave a number between 0.0 and 1.0, which represented an overall level of activity on the scale. Means and standard deviations are given for the three scales in Table 1.

The next task was to see if schools differed from each other on the three scales. Of particular interest was whether identifiable groups of schools would emerge with different patterns of scores. The technique used for this task was cluster analysis. Following the analysis, it was possible to distinguish between six clusters of schools in terms of their programme activity. These can be categorized as: (1) high activity level over all (proximal, intermediate, and distal) variables (n=6); (2)

**Table 1**  
**Means and Standard Deviations on Three School Activity Scales**

Scale	Mean	SD
Proximal	0.48	0.26
Intermediate	0.52	0.27
Distal	0.54	0.21

moderate level of activity over all variables (n=21); (3) a relatively high level of activity on proximal variables, but not on other variables (n=4); (4) a relatively high level of activity on intermediate variables but not on other variables (n=3); (5) an overall low level of activity, but distinguishable from (6) in its greater emphasis on proximal activities; and (6) an overall low level of activity, but distinguishable from (5) in its greater emphasis on distal activities.

Mean (and standard deviation) values on the proximal, intermediate, and distal scales for the six clusters are presented in Table 2. In a separate exercise, the National Coordinator and the evaluation manager rated the programs in each individual school (on a scale from 1 “the most successful” to 5 “the least successful”). The correlation between the ratings was .75. The ratings achieved by the schools identified in the six-cluster analysis were examined. All schools in the high overall activity category were found to have received above average ratings (3 of them received ratings of 1 from both raters). Schools high on the proximal scale had also

received above average ratings. Schools in the overall moderate and intermediate high categories had received average ratings while all schools in the overall low activity categories had received average or below average ratings, mostly the latter.

Table 2  
Means and Standard Deviations on School Activities for Six Clusters  
of Schools Identified in Cluster Analysis

	N	Proximal		Intermediate		Distal	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1. Overall High	6	.83	.10	.89	.09	.75	.14
2. Overall Moderate	21	.51	.14	.62	.12	.66	.11
3. Proximal High	4	.90	.11	.60	.03	.41	.19
4. Intermediate High	3	.51	.15	.92	.04	.43	.05
5. Overall Low (Prox+)	4	.50	.08	.28	.17	.15	.13
6. Overall Low (Dist+)	18	.21	.13	.24	.16	.46	.16
Total	56	.47	.26	.52	.27	.54	.21

The findings of these analyses suggested that it was reasonable to reach two conclusions. First, despite a good deal of similarity across individual schools, a distinction could be drawn between schools, particularly in terms of their level of activity, but also in terms of the focus of the programs which they had implemented. And second, on the evidence thus far available, it was reasonable to identify programs which had been identified as high in general activity and ones which had been identified

as high in proximal activity as models for the further development of home-school-community programs.

Based on these analyses, six schools were selected for more detailed study during the second and third years of the evaluation. Five of these schools had been found to have high levels of activity (two had overall high, three had high proximal) and the sixth had an overall moderate level of activity, which, however, might be considered satisfactory given that the Coordinator had spent only one day per week in the school. All six schools had also received above-average ratings of success from both the National Co-ordinator and the evaluation manager. A further consideration in selecting the schools was the representation of different geographical areas in the scheme (i.e., two locations outside Dublin and inner and outer areas of Dublin city) and the inclusion of different types of school (i.e., single sex, mixed, junior - serving only the four lower grades; senior - serving only the four higher grades, all-through - serving all eight elementary grades).

### Validity and Bias Controls

Much of the evidence in the evaluation came from reports of those involved in programs. This might be considered to give rise to problems of validity and bias. However, several factors tend to support the validity of data.

1. Some of the information was factual (e.g., providing a meeting room for parents in schools, provision of courses for parents, number of parents visiting

schools, number of home visits carried out by coordinators). There was no evidence from other sources (e.g., National Co-ordinator, evaluators on the basis of visits to schools) that inaccurate information was provided regarding these matters.

2. There was considerable consistency across schools in much of the information provided. Thus, if the information was biased, one would have to assume the unlikely situation in which a similar bias affected all schools.

3. For some evidence, judgments in the same matters were obtained from more than one source. For example, both coordinators and teachers largely agreed in their judgments about the enhanced competence of parents. Another example of such triangulation of data was that principals and teachers expressed similar perceptions of which parents were not being reached by the scheme, i.e., those perceived to be most in need.

4. Opinions and judgments are more likely to be biased than factual information (in 1 above). However, several factors singly and in combination point to the general validity of participants' responses.

(a) Frequently, concrete examples were provided to support judgments. (For example, judgments about parents' confidence and their perceptions that school was not threatening were supported by evidence of increased visits to schools.)

(b) Responses fitted with expectations of the impact of the program. Thus, impact was most likely to be reported for areas most closely related to

intervention. For example, many impacts on parents were reported, while perceived effects on the role of the class teacher or on pupils were very limited.

(c) Respondents provided negative as well as positive judgments, even when the negative judgments seemed to run counter to the spirit of the intervention. For example, a majority of teachers expressed negative attitudes to parents' involvement in the academic work of the classroom.

(d) Respondents declined to make judgments on a number of issues (e.g., the perceived impact of the program on parents' attitudes) as they felt they were not sufficiently informed to do so. This suggests a seriousness on their part to provide valid information.

5. The evaluation director consulted with the National Co-ordinator on several occasions (e.g., regarding ratings of programs at the end of the first year). Because of her frequent visits, she was very familiar with what was going on in schools. There were only a few occasions, however, on which there were relatively minor differences of opinion about scheme activities in schools or about data presented in evaluation reports.

6. Finally, the evaluators also visited schools and would have noticed if there had been any serious differences between what respondents noted and what was actually going on in schools.

### Evaluation Cost

The evaluation budget in the first year was approximately 10% of the overall cost of the HSCL program. With the extension of the scheme during the second and third years, and in spite of the extension of resources to the evaluation, the cost of the evaluation as a proportion of the total program cost decreased. As details of program costs are not available from the Department of Education, it is not possible to calculate the final evaluation cost in relation to program costs.

### Conclusion

Much of the evaluation effort was directed towards the formation and development of programs and evaluation strategies were modified as the programs developed. Sources of information for the evaluation included coordinators, principals, teachers, pupils, and parents and data was obtained through questionnaires, interviews, observations, and standardized achievement tests. Due to the extension of the scheme in the second year, six schools were selected for more detailed study during subsequent years. However, some information was also obtained from all other schools in the scheme.

## CHAPTER V

### SCHOOLS BEFORE THE HSCL SCHEME

#### Elementary Education Within the Irish Educational System

Under the Irish Constitution, recognition is given to the right and duty of parents to provide for the education of their children, whether in schools established and recognized by the State, in private schools, or in their own homes (Galton & Blyth, 1989). Education is provided free of charge and more than 95 percent of Irish children receive their primary (elementary) education in schools that are mainly government funded (Coolahan, 1994).

School attendance is compulsory for children between 6 and 15 years of age and optional for those over 4 years. However, a majority of four-year-olds (65%) and almost all five-year-olds are enrolled in primary (elementary) schools (Ireland, 1995). Part of the explanation for this may be that there is no general state provision for preschool education. As a result, the curriculum for the first two grades (Junior infants and Senior infants) incorporates “much of what is considered pre-schooling in other countries” (Primary Education Review Body, 1990, p. 72). In all, there are eight grades at primary level and pupils generally transfer to second-level education at 12 or 13 years of age.



Apart from a small number of large urban centers, Ireland is still largely a rural country. Based on figures for the 1993-94 school year, a vast majority of schools (80%) and pupils (60%) were located in areas with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. The average enrollment for these “small” schools was 116 pupils. Only a tiny proportion of schools (5%) and one tenth of pupils were located in areas with between 10,000 and 40,000 inhabitants, the average enrollment for these “medium-sized” schools being 351. The remaining schools and pupils were located in Dublin city (11% of schools and 22% of pupils) and in other urban areas (i.e., cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick, Waterford) (4% of schools and 8% of pupils). The average enrollments for these “large” schools were 311 pupils in Dublin city and 318 pupils in other urban areas (Kellaghan, Weir, Ó hUallacháin & Morgan, 1995).

Since allocation of resources is based on capitation, a large proportion of pupils are served by schools that have limited access to additional resources such as full-time remedial teachers, special education services, or psychological services. The same applies with respect to the Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage. During the 1993-94 school year, schools designated as eligible for assistance under the scheme included only 2.4% of small schools (<118 pupils), but just over a fifth (21%) of large schools (more than 406 pupils enrolled) and almost a fifth (18%) of medium-sized schools (118 - 405 pupils) (Kellaghan, Weir, Ó hUallacháin & Morgan, 1995).

The Irish system of education has been described as being highly centralized with the main roles of policy formulation and administration centered within the government Department of Education (Coolahan, 1994). Although this is the case, each primary school is administered and managed by a board of management and thus exercises a high degree of autonomy (Ireland, 1995) in relation to certain roles and functions. Each board of management is composed of representatives of teachers, parents, and nominees of the patron who, in most cases, represents the relevant church body (Kellaghan, 1985)

Funding for primary schools comes from both national and local sources. It has been estimated that about 85 percent of the total cost of education in Ireland is met by government and the remainder by local contributions and student fees (Coolahan, 1994). At primary level, grants from the government cover a minimum of two thirds of the cost of building, equipping, maintaining, and renovating primary schools with the remainder of the cost being met by local contributions. Teachers' salaries are also paid in full by the government, as is a large part of the operating costs (Galton & Blyth, 1989).

While it may be argued that power in the Irish educational system has always been distributed between the center and the periphery (Kellaghan, 1994b), the main powers of policy formulation have rested completely with central government, with little input from other sources. The input from parents has traditionally been particularly limited (Ó Buachalla, 1988).

Much of the control exercised by the Minister for Education over primary schools is applied through Rules for National Schools which were developed by the Department of Education and under which the Minister has definite powers, including the power to prescribe curriculum, the qualifications of teachers, the teacher-pupil ratio, the length of the school day and year, and teachers' salaries. Department of Education inspectors also monitor teachers' work and the operation of schools and provide reports to the minister (Galton & Blyth, 1989). The school board of management, under the chairmanship of the patron's representative, has the responsibility to ensure that the school is run in accordance with Departmental rules and, under these rules, is responsible for the appointment of teachers, the maintenance of the school and equipment, and the provision of further equipment (Galton & Blyth, 1989). In practice, the school principal generally looks after the daily management and administration of the school (Galton & Blyth, 1989).

It is in the context of such a centralized system of policy and program formulation that the HSCL scheme was developed and subsequently introduced to schools. Invitations to participate in the scheme were issued to schools already participating in a scheme for disadvantaged schools, and information meetings to describe the scheme were held with principals and chairpersons of boards of management.

Given that participation in the HSCL scheme would result in the allocation of an additional staff member as well as some additional funding, it is not surprising that

no school declined the invitation to participate. Prior to the introduction of the HSCL scheme, monitoring of funding allocated to schools for home-school-community liaison had been minimal and the range and quality of activities, where such activities occurred at all, varied a great deal (Ireland: Department of Education, 1991). It is conceivable that, at the outset, some principals expected to exercise the same degree of autonomy in relation to resources for the HSCL scheme, for example, in tackling discipline problems in their schools.

Since schools in the HSCL scheme were located in disadvantaged areas, relationships between staff and parents tended not to be very strong. Many parents' own experiences of education had been negative, causing them to avoid contact with schools as much as possible. In any case, apart from an annual parent-teacher meeting, schools generally required contact with parents only in relation to some problem or difficulty, thus further reinforcing the negative perception and experience of parents. Before parents could become integrated into the life of schools, such negative attitudes and the fears that they generated would have to be changed.

Primary schools in Ireland have traditionally operated to a large degree in isolation from the local community. Furthermore, within each school, individual teachers tended to maintain responsibility for a specific group of children and to work independently within a classroom situation. While there has been a shift in educational policy towards increased school autonomy and accountability during the 1980s and 1990s (Coolahan, 1994), this change has been slow to influence the practices in

individual schools. Therefore, through its philosophy of empowerment (particularly of parents) and high emphasis on increased integration of schools into the local community, the HSCL scheme could be viewed as requiring a radical change in the operation of Irish primary schools. The imposition of the scheme by the central Department of Education without consultation with teachers or other relevant groups was not in keeping with the overall philosophy of empowerment and partnership of the scheme itself, nor did it create a situation conducive to bringing about the required changes in schools.

#### Policy and Practice in Schools in Relation to Parent Involvement Prior to the Introduction of the HSCL Scheme

Information on home-school structures and relationships in schools prior to the introduction of the HSCL scheme was obtained in a School Profile that was completed by school principals upon entry of their school into the scheme. During the first year, principals of 54 schools provided information (2 principals did not respond) and, during the second year, principals of all additional schools (n=24) completed the School Profile.

#### School Boards of Management

Prior to the introduction of the HSCL scheme, all schools in the scheme had some basic structures in place to facilitate home-school relationships. All but four had a board of management with parental representation. In over a fifth (22%) of schools,

more than half the members of the Board were parents. More commonly, parent representation was lower with parents constituting between 21 and 50 percent of Board membership in 64% of schools and less in the remaining schools (14%).

Principals were asked to describe the role of parent members of the Board of Management in relation to (a) school policy; (b) curriculum; and (c) school rules. They were also requested to note other matters in relation to which parents had a role. The responses were coded as passive role (e.g., informed of rules and endorsed them, supportive), consultative (e.g., discuss and vote, advisory, full participation in formulation of policy), leading (e.g., sub-groups of parents develop and present options to the Board), or no role at all.

Principals in a majority of schools (54%) indicated that parent members of the Board of Management played a consultative role in relation to school policy. In just over one-tenth of schools (11.5%), parent Board members were said to play a passive role regarding policy, while in under one-tenth of schools (9%), parent members had no role. (No response was given for 26% of schools.)

Parent members of the Board had less of a role in relation to curriculum, the role being described as consultative in just over a fifth of schools (22%), and as passive in a tenth of schools. Parent Board members had no role regarding curriculum in just over a quarter of schools (28%). (No response was provided for 40% of schools.) These findings are perhaps not surprising given that the curriculum for primary schools is designated by the Department of Education. Schools do, however,

have some choice in relation to curriculum enrichment activities (e.g., speech, drama, music, sports) about which parents might be consulted.

Principals reported that parent members of the Board of Management in almost half the schools (45%) played a consultative role regarding school rules. This role was described as passive in 15% of schools, while parent members had no role in 8% of schools. (No information was available for about a third of schools.)

Principals in a small number of schools noted two other school matters in which parent Board members had a role. These were maintenance (in 17% of schools) and fundraising (in 13% of schools). It is interesting to note that these were the only instances in which principals described parents' role as leading (12% of schools for maintenance and 6% of schools for fundraising). Parents in the remaining schools were described as having a consultative role in relation to maintenance (5% of schools) and fundraising (6% of schools).

### Parent Committees

In addition to parent representation on Boards of Management, two out of every five schools had parent committees or associations. The role of such associations is described as: "to represent the views of parents, to inform parents about developments in education and in the school, and to foster cooperation between parents, teachers and school management" (National Parents Council - Primary, 1991).

In effect, however, the extent to which parent committees play an active part in school matters varies considerably, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

The most frequently reported role (in 36% of schools) of members of parent committees was fundraising. This was followed by (in order of frequency): helping out with school activities, e.g., sports day, field trips, swimming (in about one-eighth of schools); organization of parent involvement in the school, e.g., library, shop, supervision of pupils (in about one-eighth of schools); meetings (in 8% of schools); discussion of school policy, e.g., discipline (in 6% of schools); and maintenance, pressure groups, and to represent parents on the National Parents' Council (each in about 1% of schools).

### Consultation With Parents

Principals were also asked whether or not parents, other than Board members, were consulted prior to changes in (a) school policy, (b) curriculum, and (c) rules. Principals in over one-eighth of schools (15%) stated that parents other than Board members were “always” consulted prior to changes in school policy. In 40% of schools, parents were “sometimes” consulted, while in just under 40% of schools parents were “never” consulted. In the remaining 5% of schools, parents were “seldom” consulted.

Principals in a vast majority of schools (77%) stated that, apart from Board members, parents were “never” consulted prior to changes in curriculum. In about



one-tenth of schools, parents were “sometimes” consulted, while in a slightly smaller proportion (8%), parents were “always” consulted prior to such changes. In a small number of schools (5%), parents were “seldom” consulted.

Parents other than Board members were “sometimes” consulted in over a third (36%) of schools prior to changes in school rules. This was “always” the case in 13% of schools and “seldom” true in 6% of schools. In less than half the schools (45%), the general body of parents was “never” consulted prior to changes in school rules.

### Parent-Teacher Meetings

Parent-teacher meetings were held in almost all schools (95%) during the school year prior to the inception of the HSCL scheme. The overall attendance at these meetings was quite good (see Table 3). It is interesting to note a slight drop in attendance from the junior middle grades, followed by an increase in the two upper grades. Parents of pupils in the two lowest grades were reported to be the best attenders, with parents of pupils in the final grade also attending in large numbers.

From among four reasons given, principals were asked to tick those reasons that they felt prevented parents/guardians from attending parent-teacher meetings. In a vast majority of schools (73%) no reason was given by some parents/guardians for non-attendance. In over half the schools (55%), principals reported that some parents/guardians could not attend because of work commitments. Lack of a baby-

sitter was given as a reason for non-attendance in 42% of schools, while, in a third of schools, parents/guardians gave illness as a reason for non-attendance.

**Table 3**

**Percentages and Numbers of Schools in Which Specified Percentages of Parents/  
Guardians Attended Parent-Teacher Meetings by Grade Level\***

	20% or less	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	Over 80%
Junior infants	0	0	10 (n:5)	34 (n:17)	56 (n:28)
Senior infants	0	0	16 (n:8)	28 (n:14)	56 (n:28)
First grade	0	4 (n:2)	6 (n:3)	40 (n:21)	50 (n:26)
Second grade	0	4 (n:2)	23 (n:13)	32 (n:18)	42 (n:24)
Third grade	0	6 (n:3)	26 (n:14)	30 (n:16)	39 (n:21)
Fourth grade	0	11 (n:6)	22 (n:12)	28 (n:15)	39 (n:21)
Fifth grade	0	11 (n:6)	20 (n:11)	22 (n:12)	46 (n:25)
Sixth grade	0	7 (n:4)	10 (n:6)	31 (n:18)	53 (n:31)

\*The numbers reported vary since not all grade levels existed in all schools

The most usual practice was to hold a meeting once or twice in the year.

Meetings were held more frequently for parents of children in grades one and six than for parents of children in other grades. A likely explanation is that additional meetings were held to discuss children's preparation for First Communion and Confirmation.

The purposes of parent-teacher meetings were described (in order of frequency) as to

discuss pupil progress (95% of schools), to discuss pupil problems (83% of schools), preparation for Confirmation (78% of schools), preparation for First Communion (71% of schools), to inform parents about school procedures (59% of schools), and to discuss the curriculum (52% of schools). Less frequently cited purposes were to discuss school problems (34% of schools) or school programs (27% of schools).

Principals in a small number of schools (n=6) also mentioned that issues relating to school governance (e.g., election to the Board of Management, parents' council) and policy (e.g., explanation of rules, discussion of discipline policy) were discussed at such meetings. Principals in a further five schools noted that issues relating to second-level education were discussed with parents.

In addition to feedback from parent-teacher meetings, parents were given the opportunity in all schools, with one exception, to discuss their children's work or problems by appointment with the class teacher.

### School-Home Communications

Communication between school and home began at an early stage in the majority of schools. Almost four-fifths of schools invited parents to visit the school before their first child started to attend. The number of years for which this had been the practice ranged from 1 to 22, the average being 8. In a slightly smaller number of schools, written information was sent to parents before their first child started school.

Again, there was variance in the number of years this had been the case, ranging from 1 to 20 years ( $M=7.4$ ).

Principals were asked to indicate the means through which parents/guardians were informed of changes in school policy, curriculum, programs, or rules. The most popular means of communication was a letter from the principal (in 97% of schools), followed by parent-teacher meetings (in 71% of schools). Information about changes was also conveyed by letter from the Board of Management (in 30% of schools) or via parent committee meetings (in 27% of schools).

In all schools (with one exception), there was provision for parents/guardians to speak to the school principal about a particular problem that they wished to discuss. In a vast majority of schools (85%), parents/guardians met the principal when requested to do so. Other arrangements that were noted by principals included (in order of frequency) that: the principal was always available (in 17% of schools); school events or meetings (in 10% of schools); availability of principal during specific time periods (in 4% of schools); meetings in the community (in 4% of schools); and informal meetings at the school entrance or in the grounds (in 3% of schools).

Written communication with homes was maintained as children progressed through school. All schools (with one exception) sent reports concerning children's work and/or behavior to parents for pupils from second grade upwards. Practically all schools sent such reports for pupils in grade one also. About a fifth of schools did not send reports to parents of pupils in the two lowest grades. In most cases, the reports

were sent once or twice a year, though a small number of schools sent reports more frequently.

Another procedure employed by schools to encourage parental contact was the holding of "open days." About two-thirds of schools organized functions to bring parents into the school. The most popular function was a play or concert (in about two-thirds of schools with open days). The next most popular function was sports (in 3 out of 5 schools), followed by invitation to classrooms, prize-giving, display of children's work, and exhibition of project work, all of which were mentioned by about a quarter of principals.

Attendance of parents/guardians at open days was lower than that for parent-teacher meetings (see Table 4). Once again, parents of pupils in the two lowest grades were reported to be the best attenders. This was followed by a drop in attendance in accordance with an increase in the grade level, with parents of pupils in the final two grades being the poorest attenders.

A comparison of the reported attendance's would seem to indicate that parents/guardians were more likely to respond to a request to attend a meeting or function that was directly related to their individual child (e.g., parent-teacher meeting) than one that was more general (e.g., open day).

Table 4

Percentages and Numbers of Schools in Which Specified Percentages  
of Parents/Guardians Attended Open Days by Grade Level\*

	20% or less	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	Over 80%
Junior infants	17 (n:6)	0	17 (n:6)	17 (n:6)	50 (n:18)
Senior infants	17 (n:6)	0	17 (n:6)	17 (n:6)	50 (n:18)
First grade	18 (n:6)	0	18 (n:6)	24 (n:8)	41 (n:14)
Second grade	22 (n:8)	6 (n:2)	14 (n:5)	31 (n:11)	28 (n:10)
Third grade	22 (n:8)	14 (n:5)	19 (n:7)	25 (n:9)	19 (n:7)
Fourth grade	27 (n:9)	15 (n:5)	21 (n:7)	21 (n:7)	18 (n:6)
Fifth grade	30 (n:10)	18 (n:6)	15 (n:5)	18 (n:6)	18 (n:6)
Sixth grade	27 (n:9)	21 (n:7)	18 (n:6)	15 (n:5)	18 (n:6)

\*The numbers reported vary since not all grade levels existed in all schools

### Parent Rooms

About two-fifths (41%) of schools had a room for use by parents. Of these schools, a majority (n=17) had a parents' room for 2-4 years, just over a quarter (n=9) had the room for 5 years, and the remaining 6 schools had the room for 6 to 10 years.

The most popular activities that had been held in parents' rooms were parent committee meetings (in almost a third of schools) and coffee mornings (in a fifth of schools). In smaller percentages of schools, lectures, classes, or courses for parents

were also held in the parents' room. These included (in order of frequency) classes related to the school curriculum (in 16 schools); art and craft, flower arrangement, knitting, sewing (in 13 schools); cookery, nutrition, budgeting, home management (in 11 schools); personal development, assertiveness, spiritual and human development (in 9 schools); adult education courses, e.g., French, English, literacy, numeracy, computers (in 4 schools); and parenting, child development, or health and medical talks (in 3 or fewer schools).

Among other activities that took place in parents' rooms were school-related meetings (in 7 schools) and meetings of community groups (in 6 schools).

In two out of every five schools, teachers availed of the parents' room to make contact with parents. Most frequently, the reason teachers went to the room was to discuss their class group with parents. Less frequently, they dropped in for a chat or attended social activities.

### Parent Involvement in Schools

Parents in most schools (4 out of 5) also provided assistance in the work of the school, particularly in extra-curricular activities. The most common activity of parents involved helping on school outings (at junior-grade level in 64% of schools, at middle-grade level in 49% of schools, and at senior-grade level in 30% of schools). Parent involvement in other activities was considerably less frequent. Further, it generally decreased from junior to senior grades. Parent activities included helping with craft

work in the classroom (in 12% of schools at junior and middle grades and in 6% at senior grades) and with playground supervision (in 10% of schools at junior level, in 9% at middle level, and in 5% at senior level). In about one-eighth of schools, parents helped in the school library. In a small number of schools, parents took small groups of children for reading and, in one school, they took them for mathematics.

### Home Visits

While many schools offered opportunities for parents to come into the school, teacher visits to pupils' homes to talk to parents were not very common. Of the 16 schools (20%) for which this practice was reported, the visits were made only once a year, usually at the discretion of individual teachers. One exception was a junior school for which the principal reported that teachers visited pupils' homes on a monthly basis. There was great variance between schools regarding the number of years for which this had been the practice, the range being from 3 to 15 years ( $M=8.06$ ;  $SD=3.75$ ).

### Conclusion

These analyses indicate that some basic structures to deal with home-school relationships were in place in all schools prior to the introduction of the HSCL scheme. Some schools had relatively few structures and all probably needed to expand the range of activities in which they were engaged. The structures were mainly related



to school governance and communication between school and home. Parents were also involved in some schools in extra-curricular activities. Parents had little involvement in situations closer to the learning-teaching situation (either at home or at school). Involvement by schools with community organizations was not common.

## CHAPTER VI

### IMPLEMENTATION OF HSCL PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS

#### School-based Activities

This chapter describes activities in schools during the three years of the evaluation of the HSCL scheme. Information about the functioning of HSCL programs in schools was obtained for each school from a School Profile completed by school principals, Progress Records completed by coordinators, and interviews with coordinators and principals. The descriptions presented here are based on analyses of those data.

#### Activities in the First Year

The analysis of activities during the first year of the scheme involved calculating the number of separate activities in which each school was engaged. These activities ranged from informal contacts with parents (e.g., chatting with them on the street) to formal training sessions designed to enable parents to work with a teacher in the classroom. In all, 369 separate activities were recorded.

The results of these analyses formed the basis for the selection of six schools for more detailed study during the second and third years of the evaluation (see Chapter IV). As such, no further analyses of activities were completed.

### Activities in the Second Year

This section contains descriptions of the provision of courses and activities in 78 elementary schools, the types of leadership roles adopted by parents within schools in the HSCL scheme, and teachers' descriptions of the activities (in the six selected schools) in which they were involved with parents.

### Courses and Activities

Coordinators were asked to list the courses and activities offered to parents in each school they served. Certain kinds of courses and activities had proven to be more popular than others. Table 5 contains a list of the courses and activities that were reported for more than 10% of elementary schools. These were designed to develop parents' general skills in four categories (in order of frequency): involvement of parents in their children's education; parents' own development; parenting; and home management.

Courses and activities related to the involvement of parents in their children's education were offered in almost all schools (n=72). These included classes in English, Irish, mathematics, and oral Irish aimed at helping parents to help their children with school work (n=41) and paired-reading programs (n=23). In addition, parents also became involved in a wide range of activities in schools. The most popular of these were parents assisting in the classroom (n=27), attending First

Table 5

**Most Popular\* Courses and Activities for Parents in Elementary Schools  
During the Second Year**

Course/Activity	Number of Schools (n: 78)
Parent involvement in children's education	72 <sup>+</sup>
Classes in English, Irish, Mathematics, Oral Irish (to help with homework)	41
Parents assisted in classroom	27
Parents involved in paired-reading program	23
First Communion/Confirmation meetings	16
Parents helped with school/class library	12
Courses to develop parents	69 <sup>+</sup>
Self-development courses	48
Personal development	30
Relaxation	12
Coping skills/stress management/assertiveness	11
Leisure courses	68
Crafts/sewing/knitting	32
Aerobics/keep fit/dancing/yoga	26
Swimming	16
Art/painting	10
Parent education	20
Computer course	10
Parenting	56 <sup>+</sup>
Parenting/teen parenting	42
Parenting and sex	16
Talks for parents on drug/solvent abuse	12
Talks on Stay Safe program	9
Home management courses	56 <sup>+</sup>
Cookery/microwave cookery	40
Health programs	21
First aid/safety in the home	11
Home management	9

\* those reported for more than 10% of schools

<sup>+</sup>There is overlap in the numbers of courses/activities per category as some schools offered more than one course or activity in a given category.

Communion/Confirmation meetings (n=16), and assisting with the school/class library (n=12). A new development during the second year of the scheme was the setting up of parent and child groups (n=4) in which parents (usually mothers) engaged in leisure activities such as music and swimming with their children.

Courses and activities to develop parents were provided in most schools (n=69) and encompassed self-development courses, leisure courses, and educational courses. Self-development courses, which were offered in almost two-thirds of schools (n=48), included, in order of popularity, personal development (n=30), relaxation (n=12), and coping skills/stress management/assertiveness (n=11). Leisure courses and activities for parents were offered in almost all schools (n=68). In order of popularity, these included courses in crafts, including knitting and sewing (n=32), aerobics/keep fit/dancing (n=26), swimming (n=16), and art/painting (n=10). Educational courses for parents were less popular than either self-development or leisure courses, being offered in only a quarter of schools (n=20). Only one educational course (computers), was offered in over 10% of schools (n=10).

Courses in the parenting category were offered in almost three quarters (n=56) of elementary schools. Within this category, parenting, including teen parenting, was the most popular course, offered in more than half the schools (n=42). Courses on specific aspects of parenting were also popular, i.e., parenting and sex (n=16), talks on drug/solvent abuse (n=12), and talks on the Stay Safe Program (n=9).

Courses and activities in the home management category were offered in almost three-quarters (n=56) of schools. These included courses in cookery and microwave cookery (n=40), health programs (n=21), first aid/safety in the home (n=11), and general home management (n=9). Courses in home maintenance/DIY and woodwork were introduced to the HSCL scheme during the second year. It may be that these courses represent initiatives to involve fathers in the project in response to acknowledgment of the need for their greater involvement.

The emphasis on practical skills for parents in courses and activities is in keeping with teachers' perceptions that practical home management skills and skills on how to help children with schoolwork are likely to be most beneficial to children at school. Further, the effects of the program on parents as perceived by coordinators often related directly to classes or activities in these practical areas and these effects are described elsewhere.

### Parents in Leadership Roles in Schools

Coordinators reported that parents had leadership roles in 60 schools. However, there was considerable variance in their perceptions of what constituted a leadership role. While some regarded helping in classrooms, fundraising, and helping with activities such as a school tour/concert as leadership activities, others did not. Again, some coordinators regarded membership of Boards of Management and Parent Committees as fulfilling leadership roles while others did not.

Principals' reports of the role played by parents on Boards of Management do not support the view that parent members have a strong leadership role. Fewer than half the principals (n=24) of first cohort schools in the HSCL scheme said that the role of parents in relation to school policy was consultative, 22 said that parents had a consultative role in relation to school rules, and only 12 said that parent members of the Board of Management had a consultative role in relation to curriculum issues. Fewer than 10 principals thought that parents played a passive role in relation to these areas while the others felt that parents played no role at all.

The leadership roles reported by coordinators included parent involvement in activities with or for children, activities with or for parents, and school governance and advocacy. Since parents in many schools were involved in more than one kind of leadership role there is overlap in the numbers reported here.

Activities With or For Children. Parents acted as paired-reading tutors or helped in classrooms in 24 schools. Helping in classrooms took various forms but usually parents led or supervised small groups of children with informal activities such as art and crafts, knitting, and sewing. Parents ran, or helped to run, the school library or toy library in 14 schools.

Parents organized activities such as swimming and art and craft classes for children (10 schools), helped with school events (outing/concert/Mass/Confirmation meetings) (8 schools), and games and yard supervision (3 schools). Parents also ran a

savings scheme (2 schools), book rental scheme (2 schools), school shop (3 schools), and a weekly disco for children (1 school).

**Activities With or For Parents.** Parents facilitated courses for other parents in 17 schools, helped the coordinator to organize courses for parents (one school), and encouraged other parents to attend school activities (one school). Examples of courses facilitated by parents included Parenting/Know Your Child, home maintenance, cookery, crafts and sewing/knitting. In one school parents ran a library for other parents in the school.

Parents managed the structures that facilitated the involvement of parents in schools and in the HSCL program in 10 schools (i.e., the Parents' Room/Drop-in Centre, play group, and crèche). Parents in one school organized a social night for “teachers and their helpers” (i.e., those parents who assisted the teacher in the classroom). In this school teachers' helpers were clearly considered by coordinators to fulfill leadership roles and that this was also recognized by other parents.

**Parent Involvement in School Governance.** Parents helped with fundraising in 17 schools and were members of school governance committees (Board of Management, parents' council/committee, Local Committee, summer project committee, child care committee) in 20 schools.



### Activities for Parents Which Involved Teachers in Six Selected Schools

The range and extent of teacher involvement in parent activities varied between the six selected schools and, in one school, teachers were not involved in any activities with parents.

Teachers and parents worked together in a variety of activities. One type of activity involved parents in the classroom helping with reading, writing, mathematics (especially with junior infants), and art and crafts (including knitting, jewelry making, and pottery). In all, 28 teachers involved parents in their classrooms. Twenty-five of these were working in two of the six schools. In one school, two teachers involved parents and in another, one teacher did. There was no parent involvement in the classroom in the remaining two schools. Table 6 provides a breakdown of parent involvement in the classroom by grade level. It is clear that involvement was confined almost exclusively to junior grades (i.e., from junior infants to second grade).

In one school, parents took small groups of children outside class for computer work and Junior Infant activities. For junior infants, groups of six parents took their own children out of class for two half-hour sessions each week over a six-week period. The activities were organized by the teacher who trained parents to work with the children.

Other activities in which parents were involved with teachers included paired-reading programs (5 schools), the organization of activities such as swimming and

Table 6

**Number of Teachers in the Six Schools Who Had Parents Involved  
in the Classroom by Grade Level During the Second Year**

Grade Level of Teacher	Number of Teachers (n: 28)
6th grade	1
5th grade	0
4th grade	0
3rd grade	1
2nd grade	7
1st grade	2
Senior infants	9
Junior infants	8
Total number of teachers	96

drama (2 schools), attendance at courses or talks given by teachers such as pre-school preparatory talks, Irish class, talk on curriculum, basic mathematics class (2 schools), homework club (1 school), and group meetings with teachers (2 schools). In one instance, a teacher was involved with parents in organizing a toy library. Table 7 provides data on the numbers of teachers who were involved in each of the above activities in the six selected schools.

Teachers made a number of suggestions as to how HSCL courses/classes could be made more relevant to teachers and pupils in the future. Some teachers (n=12) suggested training or classes for parents to enable them to help their children with homework or schoolwork. Five of these were from one school in which considerable

Table 7

**Activities Which Involved Teachers and Parents and Number of Teachers  
Who Were Involved in Each Activity During the Second Year**

Parent Activity	Number of Teachers (n: 52)
Activities outside classroom	15
Paired-reading program	14
Organized activities for children	10
Courses/talks given by teachers	6
Homework club	4
Group meeting with teacher	2
Involved in toy library	1

training of parents for classroom involvement had taken place and they felt that this should be continued and expanded. Others (n=10) suggested that the emphasis in HSCL programs should be to develop initiative among parents to organize activities (e.g., sports or extra-curricular activities for children) within their own areas.

Teachers in the six schools were also in favor of the continued provision of parenting courses (n=7) and courses on health, hygiene, nutrition, or home management (n=7), which they felt would help parents to improve the home environment of their children.

#### Activities in the Third Year

Coordinators were asked to list the courses and activities in which parents were involved and the numbers of parents who attended each course and activity in each school they served. Valid responses were received for 73 schools. It should be

noted that, since some coordinators served more than one school, there is some overlap in the reported number of parents participating in the courses and activities offered in these schools as some parents may be counted twice.

Coordinators' responses indicated that certain kinds of courses and activities were more popular than others. Table 8 contains a list of the courses and activities that were reported for more than 10% of schools. There appeared to be a heavy emphasis on the provision of courses and activities which developed parents' general skills in four categories. These were (in order of frequency) involvement of parents in their children's education; parents' own development (including leisure, educational, and self development courses); parenting; and home management.

Courses and activities relating to the involvement of parents in their children's education were offered in almost three quarters of schools and were attended by 1,746 parents (there is some overlap as one parent may be involved in two or more activities and in relation to more than one child). Activities included classes in English, Irish, Mathematics, and Oral Irish aimed at helping parents to help their children with homework (47% of schools); a total of 506 parents participated in these classes. In 29% of schools, 607 parents were involved in paired-reading programs; in 18% of schools, 218 parents helped with the school, class, or toy library; and in 15% of schools, 415 parents attended First Communion, Confirmation, or Graduation meetings.

**Table 8**  
**Most Popular\* Courses and Activities for Parents in Elementary Schools**  
**During the Third Year**

Course/Activity	Number of Schools (n:73)	Number of Parents
Parent involvement in children's education	54 <sup>+</sup>	1,746 <sup>+</sup>
Classes in English, Irish, Mathematics, Oral Irish (to help with homework)	34	506
Parents involved in paired-reading program	21	607
Parents helped with school/class/toy library	13	218
First Communion/Confirmation/graduation meetings	11	415
Leisure courses	54 <sup>+</sup>	1,631 <sup>+</sup>
Crafts/sewing/knitting	38	554
Aerobics/keep fit/dancing/yoga	34	658
Art/painting/pottery	15	93
Gardening/flower arranging	14	169
Swimming	8	157
Parents' education	38 <sup>+</sup>	483 <sup>+</sup>
Computer course	15	191
Literacy classes	13	94
Courses for the Junior and Leaving Certificate	13	135
Child care training course	8	63
Self-development	33 <sup>+</sup>	327 <sup>+</sup>
Personal development	25	289
Cultural trips	11	338
Parenting	52 <sup>+</sup>	1,148 <sup>+</sup>
Parenting/teen parenting	52	688
Talks on Stay Safe program	13	460
Home management courses	50 <sup>+</sup>	990 <sup>+</sup>
Cookery/microwave cookery	39	521
First aid	13	172
Health programs	12	156
Home management	8	141

\*those reported for more than 10% of schools

<sup>+</sup>There is some overlap in the numbers for courses/activities per category as some schools offered more than one course or activity in a given category and some parents attended more than one course.

Courses and activities to develop parents were offered in most schools and encompassed leisure courses, educational courses, and self development courses. The most popular leisure courses and activities for parents were offered in almost three quarters of schools. In order of popularity these included, crafts/sewing/knitting classes (38 schools) attended by 554 parents; aerobics/keep fit/dancing/yoga classes (34 schools) attended by 658 parents; art/painting/pottery classes (15 schools) attended by 93 parents; gardening/flower-arranging classes (14 schools) attended by 169 parents; and swimming classes (8 schools) attended by 157 parents. More than half the schools (n=38) offered the most popular educational courses. These were (in order of frequency) computer courses (15 schools) attended by 191 parents; literacy classes (13 schools) attended by 94 parents; courses for the Junior and Leaving Certificate (13 schools) attended by 135 parents; and child care training courses (8 schools) attended by 63 parents. Self-development courses were offered in 45% of schools. These included personal development courses (25 schools) attended by 289 parents and cultural trips (11 schools) attended by 338 parents.

Courses in the parenting category were offered in 71% of schools. Within this category, parenting (including teen parenting) was the most popular course and was offered in 52 schools and attended by 688 parents. Talks on the "Stay Safe" program (13 schools) were also popular and were attended by 460 parents.

Courses and activities in the home management category were offered in over two thirds of schools. These included in order of popularity, cookery/microwave

cooking classes (39 schools) attended by 521 parents; first aid classes (13 schools) attended by 172 parents; health programs (12 schools) attended by 156 parents; and home management classes (8 schools) attended by 141 parents.

A comparison of the most popular courses and activities provided for parents in elementary schools in the second and in the third school years indicates that, during the third year, there was a decrease in the number of schools providing classes in English, Irish, Mathematics, and Oral Irish (Table 9). There was also a decrease in the First Communion, Confirmation, and Graduation meetings provided in schools. There was, however, an increase in the number of schools that involved parents in paired-reading programs, and in those that involved parents helping with the school, class, or toy library.

A comparison of the number of schools providing leisure courses and activities in the second and third years indicates that there was an increase in courses such as crafts/sewing/knitting; aerobics/keep fit/dancing/yoga; art/painting/pottery; and gardening/flower arranging.

From the second to third year, there was an increase in the number of schools providing educational courses for parents. The courses included computers; literacy classes; courses for the Junior and Leaving Certificate; and child care training courses.

From the second to third year, there was a decrease in the number of schools providing self-development courses in personal development; relaxation; and in coping

Table 9

**Comparison of the Most Popular Courses and Activities for Parents  
in Elementary Schools in the Second and in the Third Year**

Course/Activity	Number of Schools (n:73)	
	Second Year	Third Year
<b>Parent involvement in children's education</b>		
Classes in English, Irish, Mathematics, Oral Irish (to help with homework)	37	34
Parents involved in paired-reading program	18	20
Parents helped with school/class/toy library	8	12
First Communion/Confirmation/graduation meetings	18	11
<b>Leisure courses</b>		
Crafts/sewing/knitting	27	37
Aerobics/keep fit/dancing/yoga	25	34
Art/painting/pottery	13	15
Gardening/flower arranging	5	14
Swimming	12	8
<b>Parents' education</b>		
Computer course	10	15
Literacy classes	5	13
Courses for the Junior and Leaving Certificate	4	13
Child care training course	1	8
<b>Self-development</b>		
Self-development	29	25
Relaxation	12	6
Coping skills/stress management/assertiveness	16	7
Cultural trips	5	11
<b>Parenting</b>		
Parenting/teen parenting	40	52
Talks on Stay Safe program	8	13
Parenting and sex	14	7
Talks for parents on drug/solvent abuse	10	5
<b>Home management courses</b>		
Cookery/microwave cookery	37	39
First aid	9	13
Health programs	18	12
Home management	11	8

Note. For purposes of comparison, the information reported here is for 72 schools (including the six selected schools) for which complete data was available for both school years.



skills, stress management, and assertiveness, but an increase in the number of schools providing cultural trips for parents.

A comparison of the number of schools providing courses in the parenting category from the second to third school year indicates that there was an increase in courses such as parenting/teen parenting and talks on the “Stay Safe” program. There was a decrease in the number of schools providing courses on parenting and sex and of talks for parents on drug and solvent abuse.

There was an increase in two of the courses offered in the home management category between the second and third year. These included courses in cookery and microwave cookery and in first aid. There was a decrease in the number of schools providing health programs and home management classes.

#### Number of New Parents

Of those parents that were involved in courses and activities, coordinators were asked to report the total number of parents who were “new” to the HSCL program for the third school year (i.e., those who had not previously been involved). It is clear that there was a great deal of variation between schools in the numbers of new parents which ranged from none (in 4 schools) to 100 (in 1 school), the average being 30.

When the numbers are grouped into four quartiles, we find that in the lowest quartile, the number of parents new to the HSCL program ranges from 0 to 8; in the

second quartile, it ranges from 10 to 23, in the third quartile from 24 to 48 and in the fourth quartile from 50 to 100. The range in the number of new parents in the top two quartiles (24-100) is much greater than that in the lower two quartiles.

### Parent Involvement in Schools

Apart from attending courses and activities some parents were also involved in various aspects of the running of HSCL activities. One such aspect was the recruitment of other parents which was seen as central to the growth and expansion of the HSCL program in schools. Coordinators in 90% of schools (n=64) involved parents in telling others about courses and activities and in encouraging friends and neighbors to get involved. There was great variation between schools in the numbers of parents who actually helped recruit other parents, ranging from none (in 7 schools) to 30 (in 1 school). In 41% of schools (n=29) between 1 and 5 parents helped recruit others and in 38% of schools (n=27) between 6 and 10 parents helped. In the remaining 11% of schools (n=8), between 12 and 30 parents helped recruit others to the HSCL program.

In two-thirds of schools (n=48) parents had also taken responsibility for maintaining the Parents' Room and running the crèche. (In some schools a FÁS worker was available to work in the crèche.) The number of parents with this responsibility ranged from 1 (in 1 school) to 12 (in 3 schools), the most frequently

reported number being 2 parents (in 15 schools). In schools where 12 parents were involved in this capacity it was on a rota basis.

In about three-quarters of the schools (n=47) parents helped in the running of parent courses. This generally meant taking responsibility for keeping attendance records (a requirement for VEC funded courses), collecting money (where required) from participants, providing refreshments, and ensuring that the room was tidied afterwards. Once again, the numbers of parents varied from 1 parent (in 2 schools) to 13 parents (in 2 schools), the most frequently reported number being 3 parents (in 14 schools).

In about half the schools (n=35) parents acted as presenters or facilitators of parent courses. In most cases (25 schools) this involved either one or two parents. However, in two schools, seven parents acted as presenters or facilitators of parent courses.

Coordinators reported the numbers of parents who had helped with extra-curricular and curricular activities, both at school level and at classroom level. In all but five schools, parents had been involved at one level or the other.

Parents were reported as being involved in school-based activities in 87% of schools. (Other estimates of parent involvement give a figure of 85%.) The most popular of these activities included (in order of frequency) helping with the school library (including visits to the library and toy library) (18 schools), school sports (including sports days) (13 schools), school concerts or plays (12 schools), paired

reading in the school (as distinct from paired reading at home with own children) (11 schools), accompanying children to swimming and on school tours (each in 10 schools), and knitting/craft work and cookery (each in 5 schools).

A further breakdown indicated that, in 69% of schools, parents had helped with extra-curricular activities in the school, while in 62% of schools, parents had helped with curricular activities in schools. The numbers of parents involved varied quite a lot between schools. Between 1 parent (1 school) and 35 parents (1 school) had helped with extra-curricular activities in schools, the most frequently reported number being 10 parents (in 11 schools) and the average being 7 parents. Between 1 parent (2 schools) and 70 parents (1 school) had helped with curricular activities in schools, the most frequently reported number being 10 parents (in 6 schools) and the average being 10 parents.

Parents were reported by coordinators as having been involved in classroom-based activities in 65% of schools (other estimates put this at 63%). The most popular of these included (in order of frequency) reading (including story telling, prereading activities, and taking groups for paired reading) (25 schools), art (including crafts) (23 schools), knitting (10 schools), library activities (5 schools), and computer activities (4 schools).

Further analyses indicated that, in almost half (48%) the schools, parents had helped with extra-curricular activities in classrooms, while, in 42% of schools, parents had helped with curricular activities in classrooms. Again, the numbers of parents

varied a lot between schools. Between 1 parent (2 schools) and 36 parents (1 school) had helped with extra-curricular activities in classrooms, the most frequently reported number being 8 parents (in 6 schools) and the average being 4 parents. Between 1 parent (1 school) and 35 parents (2 schools) had been involved in curricular activities in classrooms, the most frequently reported number being 6 parents (in 5 schools) and the average being 6 parents.

Another aspect of parent involvement in HSCL activities was membership of school committees (e.g., Parents' Council, Board of Management), membership of Local Committees, and fundraising. There was a great degree of variation in the numbers of parents involved as members of school committees, ranging from none (in 11 schools) to 40 (in 1 school). Most frequently (in 21 schools), two parents were members of school committees.

In about two-thirds of schools ( $n=46$ ), parents were involved in fundraising activities. This included general fundraising for the school and was not always directly related to the HSCL program in the school. On average, eight parents were involved, though in three schools as many as 40 parents were involved.

There were only two schools in which no parents were involved in any of the above activities. Again, there was great variation in the numbers of parents involved, ranging from 1 parent (in 1 school) to 164 parents (in 1 school), the average being 42 parents. In 50% of schools 28 parents or fewer were involved in the activities described above.

### Coordinators' Allocation of Time in the Third Year

Coordinators were asked to indicate what percentage of their time (for each school) they spent on each of a number of specified tasks during the third school year. Their responses reflected some variation between individual coordinators. However, the information presented here reflects the average amount of time for all coordinators. The largest portion of coordinators' time (26%) was spent on home visits and, when taken together with individual meetings (usually in the school) with parents (10%), indicates that coordinators devoted just over a third of their time (36%) specifically to visiting and meeting parents.

Just under a third (31%) of coordinators' time was occupied with parent courses and activities. The time covered organizing courses for parents (16%), acting as course presenter/facilitator (9%), and organizing other activities (e.g., coffee mornings, outings) (6%). A similar use of time was apparent during the second year of the scheme when coordinators reported that the provision of courses for parents was one of the three activities that took most of their time.

Meetings and contacts within the school occupied just under a fifth (18%) of coordinators' time. These included (in order of frequency) meetings/contacts with teachers (8%), with principal(s) (7%), and with pupils (3%).

Coordinators spent almost one tenth (9%) of their time in making contacts with agencies or individuals in the community. Finally, a small amount of time (2%) was taken up with arranging funding for the HSCL program. The remaining time

(4%) was occupied with (in order of frequency) reports/accounts/records (10 coordinators), meeting other coordinators (including cluster meetings and inservice) (6 coordinators), preparation and planning (5 coordinators), Parents' Association/Local Committee (4 coordinators) and toy library/crèche (2 coordinators). It is interesting to note that just over a quarter of the coordinators noted that administration and planning took up part of their time.

### Conclusion

On average, coordinators devoted most of their time (almost a third) to courses and activities for parents (almost all mothers). The most popular courses and activities during the second and third years were related directly to children's education (e.g., classes to equip parents to help with homework, paired-reading programs). Other popular courses and activities included those to develop parents, parenting courses, and courses and activities in home management.

Small numbers of parents in some schools organized activities such as swimming for children and others helped with school events. Parents in some schools managed structures for HSCL programs (e.g., parents' room, day care center), and parents were also members of school governance committees. In some schools, parents assisted in classrooms with reading, writing, math, and art and craft, though this involvement was confined almost exclusively to the first four grade levels.

## CHAPTER VII

### IMPLEMENTATION OF HSCL PROGRAMS IN THE COMMUNITY

Information for this chapter was provided in Progress Records completed by coordinators throughout the three years of the HSCL scheme. During the first year of the scheme, all coordinators (n=31) completed a bi-monthly Progress Record. In subsequent years, coordinators in the six selected schools completed Progress Records on a bi-monthly basis and were interviewed during visits to schools. All other coordinators, including those serving the second cohort schools, completed one Annual Progress Record at the end of each school year. Information from teachers and principals was collected during interviews conducted during visits to the six selected schools during the second year of the scheme.

The community-based aspect of the HSCL scheme was aimed at enhancing “active cooperation between home, school, and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of children” (Ireland: Department of Education, 1992, p.2).

The main ways in which the HSCL scheme was linked to local communities was through three aspects of coordinators' work: home visits; local committees; and work in the community.



## Home Visits

Visits to parents' homes were considered to be central to the HSCL scheme. Coordinators were encouraged to devote up to 40% of their time to home visits, the underlying purpose of each visit being "to form a close bond between the home and the school" (Conaty & Somers, 1993, p.19).

### Home Visits in Coordinator's Overall Role

Home visits were perceived by coordinators to be highly desirable. The part such visits played in their overall role was frequently characterized by words and phrases such as essential, vitally important, and a major part of their work.

Coordinators viewed visits to the homes of all parents as valuable since personal communication between the coordinator and parent was viewed as much more effective than written notes that teachers might send home. Coordinators also suggested that a deeper level of communication occurred between the parent and the coordinator in the parent's home than in the school.

Coordinators offered various suggestions about why communication between parents and coordinators was better when it occurred in homes. Parents were more welcoming and more open as individuals (5 schools) when they were at home and, as a result tended to speak openly (4 schools). Coordinators (in 10 schools) reported that home visits were viewed by parents as a sign that the school cared about them and their families. One coordinator's perception was that parents were glad that the school

was making a real effort to meet them and listen to them, and, in turn, parents were reported to have “listened better” to what the coordinator said.

Because of the greater openness that seemed to characterize exchanges between parents and coordinators during visits to homes, coordinators (in 12 schools) reported greater success in building relationships with parents and in gaining their trust and cooperation. In one school, parents were reported to be more likely to become involved in HSCL activities if they were visited at home.

During the second year of the scheme, in 17 schools, home visits were considered the most effective means of forging links with parents who did not, or would not, come to the school. Visits to homes were a particularly important way to contact parents of children in senior classes as these parents did not usually leave their children to school or come to collect them and so were less likely than parents of children in junior classes to have any incidental contact with the coordinator in the morning or evening.

Home visits played a large part in raising and maintaining the coordinator's profile in the community (9 schools). One coordinator (who served 2 schools) stated that visiting homes had helped to clarify the coordinator's role by portraying it to parents as non-threatening and supportive. However, one coordinator who served four schools pointed out that the coordinator's role could be viewed negatively by parents if they perceived such visits as occurring only in certain homes (e.g., the homes of disruptive children).

During the third year of operation of the scheme coordinators rated the importance of home visits to HSCL programs in schools. All coordinators felt that such visits were of some importance for the success of the HSCL program. For more than half the schools (56%) coordinators rated home visits as “Very important,” for just over a quarter of schools (26%) they were rated as “Important,” and for just under a fifth of schools (18%) home visits received a rating of “Somewhat important” to the success of the program.

When asked (in the third year) to rate the extent to which home visits contributed to various aspects of the HSCL program in their school(s) (e.g., addressing issues related to children, involving parents in activities), coordinators felt that for most aspects of the program, and for a majority of schools, home visits contributed at least to some extent (Table 10). This would seem to support their perception that home visits were central to the HSCL scheme. As would be expected, home visits were perceived to have contributed “to a great extent” to building deeper relationships with all parents (in 63% of schools), to providing a link between school and home for teachers (e.g., meeting parents teacher cannot meet, communicating information about the family) (in 49% of schools), to making contact with all parents (in 47% of schools), to recruiting parents for courses and activities (in 47% of schools), to making contact with parents who otherwise would not come to the school (in 44% of schools), and to building deeper relationships with those same parents (in 43% of schools).

Table 10

Percentages of Schools for Which Coordinators Rated the Contribution of  
Home Visits to the HSCL Program  
During the Second Year

	Great Extent		Some Extent		Not at All	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
<b>Issues related to children</b>						
Child's behavior at school	23	(16)	68	(48)	10	(7)
Child's attendance at school	15	(11)	69	(50)	15	(11)
Child's scholastic progress	3	(2)	90	(62)	7	(5)
Child's other problems (e.g., emotional, physical)	24	(17)	66	(47)	10	(7)
<b>Involving parents in HSCL</b>						
Recruiting parents for courses activities	47	(34)	48	(35)	6	(4)
Maintaining involvement in courses/activities	33	(24)	49	(36)	18	(13)
Receiving feedback on courses/activities	28	(20)	49	(35)	23	(16)
<b>General support for families</b>						
Contact with all parents	47	(34)	43	(31)	11	(8)
Contact with parents who did not come to school	44	(32)	53	(39)	3	(2)
Relationships with all parents	63	(45)	28	(20)	9	(6)
Relationships with parents who did not come to school	43	(31)	57	(41)	0	(0)
Providing support with problems, illness, etc.	33	(24)	58	(42)	8	(6)
<b>Issues related to teachers</b>						
Providing a link between school and home	49	(36)	51	(37)	0	(0)
Getting teachers' input to the program	15	(10)	64	(44)	22	(15)
Support regarding discipline problems	18	(13)	63	(46)	19	(14)

Aspects of HSCL programs to which coordinators regarded home visits as having contributed “to some extent” included mainly those related to teachers and to children. Home visits were perceived as providing some opportunity to get teachers' input to the program (in 64% of schools) which essentially entailed responding to their requests to visit pupils' homes and giving advice on involving parents in their school work. In 63% of schools, coordinators felt that visits to homes had provided some support regarding discipline problems. Regarding issues related to children, home visits were perceived to have contributed “to some extent” to addressing children's scholastic progress (in 90% of schools), children's school attendance (in 69% of schools), children's social behavior (in 68% of schools), and children's problems, such as emotional or physical problems (in 66% of schools).

While the proportion of schools in which coordinators regarded home visits as having contributed “to some extent” to issues related to children might seem high (particularly the 90% of schools for which home visits were perceived to have contributed to children's scholastic progress), coordinators stressed that the number of children involved was quite small.

#### Purposes of Home Visits

Most coordinators gave a few reasons for visiting parents at home, which can be grouped into three overall purposes: to deal with issues relating to children; to

involve parents in HSCL activities; and to make contact with and provide support for families.

Many coordinators reported two or even three different reasons for carrying out home visits that directly related to children. The most frequently reported purpose of visiting homes in relation to children in the second year was to comply with the request of a teacher (22 schools) or a principal (9 schools). In the third year, on average, about 15% of home visits were requested by the principal(s) while about 22% were requested by teachers. Visits in response to requests from school staff usually took place when a parent had not responded to requests by school personnel to meet them to discuss issues such as children's educational difficulties, school attendance or behavior, or when the teacher had suspected some difficulty in the home.

During the second year of the scheme, coordinators also visited homes to discuss children's school attendance (18 schools), behavior at school (15 schools) and educational difficulties (8 schools), to mediate in disputes between school/home/other children (8 schools), to meet parents of incoming children (7 schools), and to make contact with parents of neglected children (4 schools). Home visits were also the focus of a link with post-primary schools. In three schools, coordinators visited homes to discuss second-level options with parents of sixth class pupils. On a broader level, they went to homes in connection with children's referrals to specialists and agencies, usually to inform parents of appointments (6 schools) and to follow up on referrals (6 schools). Coordinators also took sick children home (6 schools).

During the third year of the scheme coordinators reported that about 29% of visits were related to children (Table 11) and included discussion of school progress or problems (5% of visits), discussion of child's behavior at school (4% of visits), discussion of child's attendance (4% of visits), gaining consent for or arranging psychological assessment, referral, or placement for a child (4% of visits), advising parent on helping with child's schooling or homework (4% of visits), and discussion of other problems (e.g., emotional, physical) child had (4% of visits).

Coordinators also visited homes to recruit parents to courses (38 schools) and to other HSCL activities (e.g., coffee mornings, paired reading) (19 schools). Home visits were considered to be important in making initial contact with parents (2 schools) and for getting to know them (4 schools); which was particularly true in relation to parents who had not heard about the HSCL program. A coordinator who served two schools saw home visits to parents of incoming children as a way of initiating a relationship with parents before their child started school, thus providing a vital link between home and school from the beginning of the child's schooling. Twenty-two per cent of home visits during the third year were related to parent involvement in the HSCL program. Such visits were mainly to inform parents about courses or activities and to recruit them (13% of visits) and to follow up on non-attendance at courses or activities (9% of visits).

Table 11

**Percentages of Home Visits Conducted for Various Specified Purposes  
During the Third Year of the Scheme**

<b>Purpose of Visit</b>	<b>Percentage of Visits</b>
<b>General contact with families</b>	<b>35*</b>
Contact with new families	15
Contact with parents who did not visit school	9
Support for family or personal problems	6
<b>Issues related to children</b>	<b>29*</b>
School progress/problems	5
Child's behavior at school	4
Child's school attendance	4
Gaining consent for/arranging psychological assessment/placement/referral of child	4
Advising on helping with child's schooling or homework	4
Discussion of child's emotion/physical problems	4
Other	4
<b>Parent involvement in HSCL</b>	<b>22*</b>
Inform and recruit parents for courses/activities	13
Follow up on nonattendance at courses/activities	9
<b>Support for schools and teachers</b>	<b>15*</b>
Provide a link between home and school	8
Other	7

\*Total percentage for category

Finally, coordinators visited homes to make contact with and to provide support of some kind for children's families (in 64 of the 72 schools during the second year). In 32 schools, home visits were carried out to provide ongoing support for families by developing and strengthening relationships with them. Homes were also visited to make contact with new families in the area or with parents the coordinator



would not usually meet, to get to know parents, and to build up relationships of trust and cooperation with them. In a further six schools, coordinators visited because parents had asked them to discuss problems or to provide information. In 18 schools, the purpose of coordinators' visits was to support families in crisis or parents with specific difficulties. Such difficulties included family problems, parents' personal problems, parents' illness, and family bereavements.

During the third year of the scheme, about 35% of visits were related to general contact with families (Table 11). This included contact with new parents and families (15% of visits), contact with parents who did not come to the school (9% of visits), and support for parents with family or personal problems (6% of visits).

A smaller proportion of home visits (15%) were related to support for schools and teachers. These were mainly to provide a link between home and school (i.e., meet parents teacher cannot meet, share information about families) (8% of visits).

#### Issues Addressed During Home Visits

During the second year of the scheme, coordinators in 47 schools reported that they always succeeded in addressing their intended purpose during a home visit, while coordinators in 23 schools did not. Most coordinators gave reasons why they were or were not successful in addressing what they had intended during home visits. The reasons related to the relationship between the coordinator and parents, time limits on home visits, and parents not being at home when the coordinator visited.

The relationship between the coordinator and parents affected whether or not it was possible to achieve the intended purposes of a home visit. Coordinators who always achieved their purpose had already built up a high profile in their area and were known by parents (17 schools). They also said that they had built relationships of friendship, honesty, and trust with parents. Parents continued to be welcoming and open towards coordinators, even when the messages to be relayed were negative, for example, when a parent was being informed about a child's educational or behavioral difficulties at school (11 schools). Coordinators who had always addressed their intended purpose reported that they always made a point of telling parents the intended purpose of their visit even if the problem could not be dealt with at that stage because of more pressing concerns in the home. One coordinator pointed out that home visits served multiple purposes and that, even if the coordinator's primary purpose was not addressed, another purpose—that of building up trust and cooperation among parents—could always be met.

The emergence of more pressing problems during the course of a home visit was a crucial factor in determining the outcome of a visit. It would seem that the reaction of the coordinator to an unexpected situation determined whether or not he or she succeeded in achieving an intended purpose and, indeed, whether the purpose was still valid. The reactions of coordinators to finding out about more immediate problems in the home varied. Among those who managed to address their original purpose, even where more significant problems became apparent, some coordinators

(serving 5 schools) would just mention their original purpose at the end of the visit and arrange to visit the parent again shortly afterwards. One of these coordinators would also begin to deal with the new problem by referring parents to other personnel or agencies that could help them.

In 18 schools, the coordinator's intended purpose became secondary to the problems that emerged during the visit because parents were not interested in, or responsive to, the coordinator's intended purpose, often because they were too overburdened to deal with their children's needs. When it became obvious that parents already had enough to cope with, coordinators often delayed communication of negative messages. They believed that, at such times, the best approach was to listen to the parent.

Coordinators (serving 5 schools) who always managed to address their intended purpose reported that they considered the time limits on visits, planned well in advance, and worked within that plan. Coordinators serving four schools reported that they could not address the intended purpose of a home visit because parents were often not at home when they called to see them. Another coordinator reported that many parents would not answer the door to the coordinator.

#### Time Spent on Home Visits

Although coordinators, on average, spent 26% of their time on home visits during the third year, for a majority of schools (70%), coordinators felt that the

amount of time spent visiting homes was not adequate. For almost three-quarters (73%) of the schools in which home visiting was not regarded as adequate, coordinators felt that they visited 50% or less of those homes they would like to have visited. For just over a fifth (22%) of schools, coordinators reported visiting between 51 and 75% of those homes, while coordinators in only 6% of schools were satisfied that they had visited 76% or more of the homes they would like to have visited.

### Local Committees

At the outset of the scheme, precise details about the nature and composition of Local Committees were left for decision to the National Steering Committee. It was expected, however, that representatives from schools, parents/families and local statutory and voluntary organizations would make up the membership (Ireland: Department of Education, 1990a). It emerged that the issue of Local Committees generated much concern among some principals, chairpersons of Boards of Management, and local coordinators. Following discussion at a National Steering Committee meeting in September 1990, a sub-committee was formed to formulate proposals regarding Local Committees. In their report to the National Steering Committee, the sub-committee recommended that the development of Local Committees should be postponed until various overlapping informal groups, engaged in specific projects, had developed parents' skills to enable them to play an active role on such committees.

At the October 1990 meeting of the National Steering Committee, concern was expressed “that it might take up to two years before all these committees would be operational” and it was agreed to give the issue further consideration.

Following discussions at the December and January meetings of the National Steering Committee, a draft document, Home/School/Community Pilot Project Local Coordinating Committees (Ireland: Department of Education, 1991b), was presented at the March meeting of the committee. This document was subsequently discussed during preliminary meetings with principals, chairpersons of Boards of Management, and local coordinators about the formation of Local Committees in their areas. The contents of the document were also presented to local coordinators during the February 1991 inservice course. According to this document a Local Committee, representative of the three groups, home, school, and community, would be established “in each project area” and would be “related to primary education in its activities.” The document outlined the purposes of such a local coordinating committee as described in Chapter III.

The document An Explanatory Memorandum for Schools (Ireland: Department of Education, 1991a) contains one further point of clarification relating to what is meant by each project area:

In some instances a local group may represent a small number of schools serving a defined geographical area. In other instances a Local Committee may serve a wider area. It will be open to Local Committees to form sub-committees on an ad hoc basis to consider certain issues.

From the outset, the underlying philosophy of the HSCL scheme has been that work carried out in individual programs/schools/areas should be directly related to the needs of that area as identified by representative Local Committees working with local coordinators. Thus, a Local Committee was identified as one source for determining the focus of programs as well as being a forum for communication between parents, school staff, and members of community agencies.

During the first year of the scheme, there was some delay in establishing Local Committees. By the end of the school year, 25 primary schools had done so. It was decided that coordinators and schools should receive support from the National Coordinator in establishing Local Committees and in ensuring that they functioned as intended. Therefore, further development of Local Committees was deferred to the third year of the scheme, at the end of which 33 primary schools had set up a Local Committee. The number of parents involved as members of Local Committees was generally between two and seven per school.

A major problem in developing Local Committees seems to have been a lack of understanding of the role and function of a body which is essentially voluntary with no obvious associated authority or power. Further, since other committees often existed in many areas, the need for an additional committee was not always obvious. Some confusion arose about how much power to give parents and about the extent to which partnership should be extended beyond the parent-teacher-child relationship to the discussion of other issues. Other difficulties arose in the choice of parents, as some

were viewed as having other agendas, in the reluctance on the part of parents to serve on a committee (either because of fear of schools, lack of confidence in their ability to do so, or because of membership on various other community committees), and in training selected parents in committee skills.

Poor attendance also proved to be a problem because of lack of time on the part of many members and, perhaps, because of a feeling that very little was being accomplished. In some cases also, an emphasis on the formalities of running a committee meant that very little time was devoted to anything else. It also proved difficult to establish "ownership" of the committee among the various individuals and to identify leadership within the group. Further, given the presence of a large number of professionals on committees, it was easy to give parents the impression that they were being excluded through the use of jargon with the result that they hesitated to put forward their views.

Apart from membership or representation on the committee and links established by individual coordinators, very few local committees developed links with other agencies. This probably reflects the fact that the committee was not perceived as having any official function or status.

Despite difficulties, the concept of the Local Committee was seen by school personnel to be good in itself and no other arrangements were suggested that would fulfill its envisaged role.

At the end of the second year, three coordinators (serving a total of 5 schools) felt that Local Committees served as a vehicle for parents to provide input to HSCL programs “to a great extent” and attributed this to the involvement of parents in planning and evaluating program activities and to the fact that parents provided feedback from people in the community.

Coordinators felt that Local Committees served as a vehicle for parent input “to some extent” in 18 primary schools. One coordinator indicated that Local Committees did “not at all” serve as a vehicle for parent input to HSCL programs (two schools). This was attributed to principals' lack of support for the scheme and to the fact that principals controlled “the flow of information to and from parents.”

#### Teachers' Knowledge of the Local Committee

During the second year of the scheme, 96 teachers in the six selected schools were asked if a Local Committee had been set up for their school and to describe the role of the committee with regard to HSCL activities. From their responses it is clear that teachers were not aware of the operation of a Local Committee, much less its role in the organization of the HSCL scheme at local level. This was true even of teachers in schools where Local Committees had been set up.

Seventy-nine of the 96 teachers were unable to say whether or not a Local Committee had been set up in their school. Of the 17 teachers who gave a response, six answered incorrectly that a Local Committee either had or had not been set up for



their school. Only five teachers specified a role for the Local Committee regarding HSCL activities. Mostly, the role of the committee was seen in terms of encouraging and enhancing wider community involvement and of providing a forum for the ideas and suggestions of different parties (e.g., coordinator, parents, principal).

At the end of the third year, where a Local Committee had been established, coordinators felt that the committee had been “Very effective” in directing the HSCL program in 21% of primary schools, and “Somewhat effective” in 64% of primary schools, while coordinators serving 14% of schools felt that the Local Committee made no difference. However, no coordinator felt that the HSCL program would have been better without the Local Committee.

For primary schools that had a Local Committee (n=26), coordinators were asked to rate the extent to which various factors (e.g., support from principal, functioning of Local Committee) affected the success of the Local Committee in directing HSCL programs in their school(s) during the third year of the scheme (Table 12). Overall, there was a lack of discrimination in the responses. However, the factors identified by coordinators as having contributed “to a great extent” to the success of a Local Committee were (in order of frequency) parent awareness of HSCL (in 48% of schools), support from principal (in 42% of schools), degree of cooperation and effort of committee members, and community awareness of HSCL (each in 37% of schools).

Table 12

**Percentages of Schools for Which Coordinators Rated the Extent to Which  
Specified Factors Affected the Success of Local Committees in Schools  
During the Third Year**

	Contributed to Success				Hindered Success				Not Relevant	
	Great Extent		Some Extent		Some Extent		Great Extent			
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
Support from principal	42	(11)	54	(14)	4	(1)	0	(0)	0	(0)
Support from Board of Management	28	(7)	36	(9)	0	(0)	0	(0)	36	(9)
Teacher awareness of HSCL	8	(2)	56	(14)	8	(2)	0	(0)	28	(7)
Parent awareness of HSCL	48	(13)	48	(13)	0	(0)	0	(0)	4	(1)
Community awareness of HSCL	37	(10)	48	(13)	0	(0)	0	(0)	15	(4)
Functioning of Local Committee	0	(0)	41	(11)	19	(5)	4	(1)	0	(0)
Degree of cooperation and effort of committee members	37	(10)	56	(15)	7	(2)	0	(0)	0	(0)

### Coordinators' Work in the Community

Coordinators' work in the community is described mainly in the context of their contacts with community agencies and individuals throughout the three years of the

HSCL scheme. The agencies and individuals referred to in this section include both statutory and voluntary entities with responsibility for various initiatives at local level.

### **Statutory Agencies and Individuals**

One group of statutory agencies and individuals provide services related to health and social services, mainly under the auspices of the local health board. They include advice services (e.g., social services center, child guidance service), health and dental health clinics, and professionals such as public health doctors and nurses, community health officers, social workers, community and social welfare officers, psychologists, and speech therapists that provide ongoing advice and care as required.

The main government agency with responsibility for adult education is the Vocational Education Committee (VEC) which operates through committees set up in each county throughout the country.

Another statutory agency with major responsibility for training and education, mainly focused towards employment, is (Foras Aiseanna Saothair) FÁS. In the larger cities, provision for adult education is also catered for under the auspices of the city corporation, a body receiving funding mainly from local taxes and accountable to local elected representatives.

In addition to law enforcement functions carried out by the police force, individual police officers are also assigned as Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs) and Community police. JLOs monitor juveniles who have committed an offense while the

main function of community police is to build up positive relationships between the police and the local community. Particular emphasis under the community policing scheme is given to establishing links with schools and school-going children. In the main cities the task of following up on children who are poor school attenders is carried out by a school attendance officer (employed by the city corporation) but, in other areas, this function is carried out by police officers.

In 1991, the government established the Area-Based Response to Long-Term Unemployment project in twelve pilot areas of the country. The central basis of the project was the development of an area action plan and decision-making at local level.

The main objectives of the project were to develop the skills and self-confidence of people who were long-term unemployed or considered to be at risk of becoming unemployed; to promote local economic initiatives; and to encourage employers to recruit people who were long-term unemployed (Ireland: Department of the Taoiseach. Area Partnerships Coordination Office, 1991). Area Partnership Companies were established to organize and coordinate the various activities within the project.

Other statutory services available within communities include the library service, liaison services for the traveling people (a minority group), and housing placement services.

### Voluntary Agencies

Several voluntary associations have been active in local communities for many years providing a range of services mainly on an ad hoc basis. The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) works to educate the public about issues related to children as well as to provide services for children in crisis situations (e.g., emergency telephone counseling service). The Society of St. Vincent de Paul raises funds and provides services on a local basis for people in need (e.g., meals on wheels, financial assistance, clothing, food hampers at Christmas). Barnardo's provides services for children, while other organizations provide services for youth.

### Contacts With Community Agencies/Individuals During the First Year

Progress Records completed by coordinators (n=31) on three occasions (January/February; March/April; and May/June during the first year of the scheme contained a list of statutory, nonstatutory, and voluntary agencies/individuals, and each coordinator was asked to state how often during each time period had they been in contact with the listed community agencies/individuals. Twenty-nine coordinators reported making contact with the same community agencies/individuals over the three time periods. No data were available for two coordinators.

Coordinators contacted a variety of community agencies/individuals including public health nurses, social workers, health clinics, playgroups/nurseries, the Vocational Education Committee (VEC), Juvenile Liaison Officers, community police,

the Health Board, school attendance officers, voluntary youth organizations, family resource centers, library services, the St Vincent de Paul Society, and youth services (Table 13). Community agencies/individuals were contacted at least once during May/June 1991 or once a week during this period by the coordinators (n=29).

When asked to give an account of the outcomes of their community contacts, coordinators (n=29) stated that contacts were at an introductory "get to know you" level. For example, initial contacts with community agencies/individuals were made to publicize and explain the aims and objectives of the HSCL scheme; to outline the role of the coordinator; to establish relations with community agencies/individuals; to gain information on their services; to seek funding for courses/activities; to seek resources for courses/activities; and to establish a better working relationship between the school and community agencies/individuals. Community contacts were also made to share information about families, children, and the local area; to obtain advice and support for the HSCL scheme; to arrange meetings to discuss the needs of the local area; to organize events, activities, and courses; to organize fund-raising activities; to plan HSCL programs; and to set up referral systems for parents and pupils. Towards the end of the year, some coordinators reported having better relationships with community agencies/individuals, and with parents, and that relationships between parents and staff were also improved. Other benefits noted by some coordinators were greater networking and sharing of information and resources; increased parent involvement in courses/activities in the school; increased involvement of specific

Table 13

**Number of Coordinators Who Contacted Community  
Agencies/Individuals During the First Year**

Agency/Individual	Number of Coordinators (n:31)
<b>Statutory</b>	
Public health nurse	23
Social worker	21
Health clinics	21
Playgroups/nurseries	19
Vocational Education Committee	17
Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO)	17
Community police	16
Health Board	16
School attendance officer	15
Family resource center	13
Library services	12
Youth services	11
FÁS	11
Community health officer	9
Public health doctor	9
Community welfare officer	7
Elected political representative	7
Residential care worker	7
Travelers' Liaison Officer	6
Social welfare officer	5
Family development nurse	5
Housing placement officer	2
<b>Voluntary</b>	
Youth organizations	15
St. Vincent de Paul Society	12
Sports organization	9
Local community council	9
Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC)	8
Parents under stress group	4

community agencies/individuals (e.g., community police, social worker) in the school; greater organization of courses/activities; and more stable contact with community agencies/individuals in relation to HSCL programs in schools. Six coordinators stated that due to the improved relationships between the school and community agencies/individuals, their schools had developed an improved image and higher profile in the community regarding caring about their pupils.

#### **Contacts With Community Agencies/Individuals During the Second Year**

At the end of the second year, coordinators in 72 schools listed the three local agencies or individuals with whom they had most contact in the course of their work. In one school, the coordinator, who served two schools, reported that she had very little regular contact with agencies. In the other schools, contacts with agencies and individuals varied according to local service provision and availability. Most coordinators' contacts were grouped into four main categories. These were (in order of frequency) contacts with voluntary helping agencies, health and social service agencies, agencies related to parents' education, and local community initiatives (Table 14).

Contacts with voluntary helping agencies were the most common type reported for 38 schools. These included youth organizations, the Catholic Social Service Conference, and the Mater Hospital Child and Family Guidance Clinic. Contacts with representatives of health and social service agencies were reported for 37 schools. In



Table 14

Number of Schools for Which Coordinators Contacted Local  
Agencies/Individuals During the Second Year

Agency	Number of Schools (n:72)
<b>Voluntary Helping Agencies</b>	<b>38<sup>+</sup></b>
Youth Organizations (e.g., Catholic Youth Council, Youth Services)	15
Catholic Social Services Conference (provide Family Resource Centers)	13
Mater Hospital Child and Family Guidance Center	6
Mental Health Association worker	4
Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC)	4
Barnardo's	3
Catholic Marriage Advisory Council	2
Outreach	1
St. Vincent de Paul Society	1
<b>Health and Social Service Agencies</b>	<b>37<sup>+</sup></b>
Public Health Nurse	15
Social Worker	11
Social Services Center	6
Health Board	4
School Psychologist	4
Child Guidance Service	3
Speech Therapist	3
Local clinic	1
Child Care Service	1
Day Care Center	1
Irish Dental Foundation	1
Local dental health clinic	1
<b>Adult Education</b>	<b>30<sup>+</sup></b>
Vocational Education Committee	23
Dublin Corporation	11

Agency	Number of Schools (n:72)
Local Initiatives	21 <sup>+</sup>
Women's group	6
Community Development Association Project/Worker	5
Parish Center	6
Parish Sister	7
Parish Priest	3
Community workers (unspecified)	6
Informal, professional support group	2
Other	17 <sup>+</sup>
Community Police/Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO)	6
School Attendance Officer	2
Play group teacher/assistants	2
Local coffee shop	2
Stay Safe Team	1
Gardening Club	1
Community Arts and Education Group	1
Course tutor	1
Individual parents	1

\*There is overlap in the numbers in each category since coordinators in some schools contacted more than one agency/individual in the category.

this category, contacts with the public health nurse and social worker were most frequent. Contacts in relation to parents' education with the VEC and Dublin Corporation were reported for 30 schools. Contacts with local community workers and representatives of local development initiatives were reported for 21 schools. These included the local community development association, women's group, parish center, and parish sister. Of other contacts reported by coordinators, contact with community police/Juvenile Liaison Officers/school attendance officers were most frequent.

### Contacts With Community Agencies/Individuals During the Third Year

Coordinators were asked to list the community agencies and other relevant community workers with whom they had contact during the third year. They were also given a list which contained a number of specified purposes for each contact with an agency and an individual and were asked to tick the purpose(s) of the contact(s) for each agency and individual listed. The number of contacts with community agencies and individuals varied between schools and ranged from 2 (in 1 school) to 18 (also in 1 school). The average number of community contacts was 10. It is possible that the number of spaces provided (i.e., 10) in the Annual Progress Record influenced the number of community contacts listed by coordinators.

Table 15 contains the number of schools for which coordinators contacted various community agencies and individuals and the purposes of the contacts. The contacts listed are those that were reported for more than 10 schools. The 15 agency/individual which was contacted by the greatest number of schools was the Vocational Education Committee, followed by the Social Worker, and Community Police. A smaller, but still substantial, number of schools contacted a public health nurse and a child and family guidance center. The most frequent reasons given for contacting an agency or individual were to apply for funds or resources (from the local VEC) and to promote networking (through a social worker). The pattern of contacts indicates that the activities of the coordinator were focused primarily on the development and resourcing of HSCL programs. However, in a considerable number

**Number of Schools for which Co-ordinators Contacted Community Agencies  
or Individuals and Purposes of the Contacts During the Third Year**

Agency/Individual	Number of Schools(n:73)	Purposes of contacts												
		Information on services	Networking	Pupil referrals	Sharing information about families	Funding application	Resources*	Local meetings	Literacy needs	Publicity	Pupil absenteeism	Pupil courses	Meeting parents	Other
Vocational Educational Committee	45	25	16	0	0	35	36	12	28	16	0	1	4	0
Social Worker	44	23	33	27	29	1	4	14	0	14	13	2	6	0
Community Garda	42	23	27	7	21	1	8	23	1	16	20	10	6	1
Public Health Nurse	30	26	21	20	25	1	10	14	2	14	6	5	12	5
Child & Family Guidance Centre	27	15	12	27	19	0	0	3	0	8	2	1	1	1
Area Partnership Companies	23	17	12	0	0	13	12	10	7	14	2	0	3	2
Cork & Dublin Corporations	21	11	5	0	0	4	21	3	0	2	0	0	1	0
Health Board	17	13	17	11	8	0	8	12	0	4	5	3	3	0
Juvenile Liaison Officer	17	11	14	6	16	0	2	7	0	6	6	3	2	1
St Vincent de Paul Society	17	14	12	0	10	5	4	7	0	7	0	0	2	0
Parish Team	17	13	17	2	10	0	8	16	2	16	0	1	8	0
Department of Social Welfare	16	4	3	0	2	14	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Literacy Scheme	13	9	9	0	1	0	3	4	13	5	0	0	3	0
Playschool/Pre-school	13	4	9	5	10	0	4	6	0	7	0	2	7	0
Speech Therapist	12	9	3	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Barnardo's	12	7	4	5	2	1	7	0	0	1	1	3	1	1
Psychological Services	11	2	2	11	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	2
Attendance Officer	10	4	10	10	10	0	1	4	0	1	10	2	3	0
FÁS	10	4	4	0	0	7	5	2	2	4	0	0	0	0

\*(facilities, teachers, funding for parent courses/activities)

of schools, contacts were with agencies/individuals who would be likely to provide emergency services to deal with the problems of children or of families. Agencies/individuals associated with such action that were contacted by coordinators include community police, a public health nurse, a child and family guidance center, a health board, a juvenile liaison officer, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Department of Social Welfare, speech therapist, psychological services, and a school attendance officer.

Coordinators were asked to list the number of local community initiatives and agencies with whom they had contact during the third year. Local community initiatives included agencies or individuals that provided services in the local area. The services provided included youth services; women's centers; mothers' groups; community development projects; and education and training groups among others. In Dublin's north inner city coordinators listed 25 local agencies that they had contacted; in both Tallaght and Finglas coordinators had contacted 11 such agencies; in Clondalkin 10 local agencies had been contacted; in Ballymun coordinators contacted 8 local agencies, in Dublin's south inner city the number of agencies was 7 while, in north outer Dublin city, there were 4 local agencies contacted by coordinators. Outside of Dublin coordinators had contacted 11 local agencies in Cork, 7 local agencies in Limerick, and 6 local agencies in Galway.

### **Extent to Which Various Community Agencies and Individuals Contributed to the Success of the HSCL Scheme**

During the third year of the scheme, coordinators were asked to rate the extent to which each community agency and individual had contributed to the success of the HSCL scheme. Table 16 lists the community contacts that were reported for more than 10 schools. Coordinators tended to rate most of the community agencies and individuals as contributing either “to a great extent” or “to some extent” rather than “not at all” to the success of the HSCL scheme. Contacts made by coordinators with various community agencies and individuals were generally perceived to have contributed in some way to the success of the HSCL scheme.

The community agencies and individuals that coordinators rated as contributing “to a great extent” to the success of the HSCL scheme were the Vocational Education Committee, Cork and Dublin Corporations, Area Partnership Companies, parish teams, and Health Boards. Those rated as having contributed “to some extent” to the success of the HSCL scheme were social workers, community police, public health nurses, child and family guidance centers, Juvenile Liaison Officers, and Vocational Education Committees.

### **Effects on Community-Related Aspects**

In relation to effects on community-related aspects of HSCL programs in schools, coordinators reported that, for most schools specified changes were true “to some extent,” while for about a third of schools these changes were true “to a great extent” (Table 17). In general most schools were reported as having become more of a focal point in the community as a result of the HSCL scheme. For almost all schools, parents were reported to have become more aware of and to have made more use of local services or agencies, while for 80% of schools, coordinators reported that the HSCL scheme had contributed to increased community spirit in the area. For the schools (n=14) for which this was not true, other unrelated factors such as increased crime in the area may have influenced the rating. For most schools, coordinators seemed to be of the view that cooperation among agencies had also improved either “to some extent” (61% of schools) or “to a great extent” (27% of schools).

### **Conclusion**

The community aspect of HSCL hinged on three aspects of coordinators’ work: home visits, Local Committees, and contacts with community agencies and individuals.

Home visits were perceived as central to the scheme, mainly as a strategy to build relationships with parents and to reach parents who had no other contact with

Table 16

**Number of Schools for Which Coordinators Rated the Extent  
to Which Various Community Agencies and Individuals\*  
Contributed to the Success of the HSCL Scheme  
During the Third Year**

Agency/Individual	Number of Schools			
	No. of Schools that Contacted Agency/ Individual	Great Extent	Some Extent	Not at All
Vocational Educational Committee	45	26	11	8
Social Worker	44	9	31	4
Community Police	42	8	30	4
Public Health Nurse	30	9	21	0
Child and Family Guidance Centre	27	8	17	2
Area Partnership Companies	23	12	8	3
Cork and Dublin Corporations	21	15	6	0
Health Board	17	10	6	0
Juvenile Liaison Officer	17	4	13	0
St. Vincent de Paul Society	17	5	9	3
Parish Team	17	12	4	1
Department of Social Welfare	16	2	9	5
Literacy Scheme	13	6	7	0
Playschool/Preschool	13	4	9	0
Speech Therapist	12	2	9	1
Barnardo's	12	1	6	5
Psychological Services	11	2	8	1
Attendance Officer	10	3	7	0
FÁS	10	4	2	4

\*Agencies and individuals listed here are those that were reported for more than 10 schools



the school (including those identified by teachers). The main purposes of home visits were to deal with issues related to children, to involve parents, and to provide support for families and, on average, coordinators spent 26% of their time visiting homes during the third year.

A major problem in developing Local Committees seems to have been a lack of understanding of the role and function of the committee. By the third year, Local

Table 17

Percentages of Schools for Which Coordinators Reported Changes  
in Community-Related Aspects of the HSCL Program  
in Schools in the Third Year

	Percentages of Schools					
	Great Extent		Some Extent		Not at All	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
School became more of a focal point of the community	28	(20)	62	(44)	10	(7)
Parents became more aware of local services/resources	36	(26)	58	(42)	6	(4)
Parents made more use of local services/resources	21	(15)	69	(50)	10	(7)
Greater community spirit in the area	29	(21)	51	(37)	19	(14)
Greater cooperation among community agencies	27	(19)	61	(43)	11	(8)

Committees had been set up to serve just under half the schools. Factors identified by coordinators as having contributed to the success of these committees were parent awareness of HSCL, support from the principal, degree of cooperation and effort of committee members, and community awareness of HSCL.

Coordinators contacted a wide variety of community agencies and individuals and the pattern of contacts changed throughout the three years. The most valued contributions were judged by coordinators to have come from agencies which one would expect to provide services relating to the long-term development of parents and communities. Agencies concerned with the economic and social development of local areas were also ranked as contributing to HSCL.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE IMPACT OF HSCL PROGRAMS

The impact of HSCL programs is described in this chapter in terms of impacts on schools, on teachers, on pupils, and on parents.

#### The Impact of HSCL Programs on Schools

Information about the impact of HSCL programs on schools was obtained in Annual Progress Records completed by co-ordinators during the second and third years of the scheme. At the end of the second year, specific changes were described for only a small proportion of schools. Rather than focusing on changes in the organization and activity of the school, many co-ordinators reported changes in the ethos of their school(s) or in specific elements that contributed to these changes (e.g., the co-ordinator as a resource in the school), changes in relationships within the school.

The format of the Annual Progress Record was adapted for the third year and co-ordinators were asked to describe impacts more specifically and in relation to four main areas: school structure; school organization; relationships within the school; and school role in the community. The responses for both years are combined in this section.

### Coordinator as a Resource in the School

From the responses of coordinators it was clear that the HSCL coordinator in each school acted as a resource person in various ways. Coordinators in 16 schools described ways in which their presence in the school served as a resource to school staff, to parents and families, and to pupils.

The coordinator was a resource to teachers in a number of ways. He/she was someone who could visit parents if the teacher had difficulty contacting them, talk to parents informally, and provide a fuller picture of family backgrounds to teachers. The presence of the coordinator in the school meant that there was someone at hand to deal with the daily issues, problems, and concerns of teachers and pupils. One coordinator acted as a resource to the school principal by meeting parents in the school, a task which would otherwise have been dealt with by the principal alone.

The coordinator was a resource to parents (one school) in that he/she had the time to meet parents informally, talk to them, and elicit their perceptions of the school. The coordinator was aware of services within the community and, as such, could work with families and identify and address parents' educational, leisure, and support needs and, where necessary, engage the help of relevant agencies outside the school.

The coordinator was a resource to pupils in two ways. Firstly, he/she was in a position to build up closer links with parents, the benefits of which might be expected to filter down to their children's education. Secondly, the coordinator could provide

services to help pupils with both educational and non-educational difficulties, for example, by arranging referrals for educational, psychological, or medical assessments.

### Changes in Relationships Within the School

In 59% of schools (n=43), coordinators reported and described changes in staff relationships within their schools, while in 38% of schools (n=28), coordinators reported no changes in staff relationships within schools.

Coordinators in 43 schools believed that the HSCL program brought about positive changes in staff relationships within their schools. Coordinators reported that relationships had improved among staff in 18 schools, between staff and coordinators in 11 schools, and between coordinators and parents in 14 schools.

Staff were perceived by coordinators in 17 schools to be more open, tolerant, friendly, willing to initiate activities, and willing to discuss matters with each other. Members of staff in one school were perceived by the coordinator to be more conscious of the collective role of staff within the school. Staff (in 14 schools) were reported to have had an interest in and involvement in the overall structure and progress of the HSCL scheme since its inception.

Coordinators in 11 schools noted an improvement in the relationship they had with staff. Members of staff in three schools were perceived to have a good understanding of the role and difficulties of the HSCL work of coordinators.

Effects of the HSCL scheme on the parent-teacher relationship were reported for 30 schools at the end of the second year. In seven schools, coordinators noted that the program provided an opportunity for parents and teachers to work together for the benefit of children and, in the remaining 23 schools, coordinators described some of the benefits. They noted that, since the HSCL scheme began, barriers between parents and teachers were being broken down, parents and teachers were getting to know each other as individuals, and more positive and cooperative relationships were being established. For example, more contact and more friendly exchanges occurred between parents and teachers, there was less conflict, aggression, and “negative vibes” between the two groups, and there was greater cooperation and consultation on school issues (17 schools). Parents and teachers understood each others' situations better and could now see more clearly how to complement each other (6 schools).

Coordinators in 15 schools reported consequences of changes in the parent-teacher relationship, all of which were positive. Coordinators in three schools remarked that parents now had a definite purpose for being in the school, sometimes taking on activities previously dealt with by teachers (e.g., organizing social nights or family days). Coordinators in a further 12 schools pointed out that parent involvement in the school was now being considered normal, even down to the presence of buggies (in 1 school). It was no longer unusual to see parents coming and going in the school and teachers were reported to be “getting more used to this.”

Coordinators in 14 schools reported improved attitudes and relationships between staff and parents at the end of the third year. Staff were perceived in 12 schools to be more open to parent involvement in classrooms and in school activities. Coordinators in four schools noted that staff were more willing to share ideas and plan for parent involvement in classrooms and in school activities. Coordinators in three schools noted that teachers were open to parents' perspectives on issues. Inservice training and staff development days were organized by coordinators in seven schools and presented by outside facilitators. Following training, staff in two schools were perceived to be more understanding and helpful with family problems associated with disadvantage.

Not all coordinators reported improvements in relationships within their schools. A coordinator serving two schools felt a loss of bond of friendship with members of staff since the introduction of the HSCL scheme because of having to serve more than one school (i.e., going to three staff rooms). One coordinator found that while some members of staff were supportive of the HSCL scheme, others were not interested in it. One coordinator mentioned that, prior to the introduction of the HSCL scheme, staff were involving parents in school activities, but since the introduction of the scheme some staff were less inclined to involve parents in school activities.

### Changes in School Structure

Coordinators were asked to describe the main changes that had occurred in their school(s) to accommodate the HSCL scheme.

Coordinators in 60 schools reported and described changes in the structure of their schools to accommodate HSCL work in terms of space and resources that were made available for this purpose. These included a room to serve as an office for the coordinator's and HSCL work (18 schools); a room to serve as a classroom for parents' courses (12 schools); a room to serve as a drop-in center and/or parents' room (37 schools); a room to serve as a crèche or playroom (16 schools); and a room to serve as an adult library (2 schools). Resources for parents' use were also provided (e.g., computers, woodwork materials, cookery materials, art and crafts materials, and tea and coffee making facilities) (8 schools).

Coordinators pointed out that rooms such as the school hall (6 schools), classrooms (5 schools), the school library (5 schools), the cookery room (4 schools), the computer room (4 schools), the staff room (3 schools), the art room (2 schools), the kitchen (2 schools), the woodwork room (1 school), the secretary's office (1 school), the principal's office (1 school), the storeroom (1 school), the cloakroom (1 school), and a doctor's room (1 school) were made available for HSCL work in schools. Coordinators in three schools stated that funds were made available to establish and refurbish rooms for HSCL work. Coordinators in two schools reported that a room was built in each school especially for HSCL work.



### Changes in School Organization

In 59% of schools (n=43), coordinators reported and described changes in the organization of their schools to accommodate HSCL work particularly in relation to the provision of activities to involve parents in the school. In 40% of schools (n=29), coordinators reported no changes in the organization of their schools.

Coordinators in 43 schools reported that where possible, principals changed the school timetable to accommodate HSCL work. The school timetable was modified to allow parents to use the school hall (10 schools), the cookery room (4 schools), the school library (3 schools), the staff room (1 school), the school gym (1 school), the kitchen (1 school), the computer room (1 school), the television room (1 school) and a classroom (1 school) for various activities and classes. Teachers in eight schools were reported to have rearranged their class timetables to accommodate parents helping in the classroom (e.g., paired reading, knitting, art and crafts). Four schools were reported to have rearranged their school timetable to facilitate parents running school facilities (e.g., library, book shop, savings scheme).

Coordinators were given time at staff meetings (in 6 schools) to discuss the role and aims of the HSCL scheme. Coordinators (in 7 schools) had regular meetings with individual teachers and principals. A coordinator serving two schools reported meeting and planning with principals, school staff, and Boards of Management to timetable and coordinate HSCL activities.

### School Role in the Community

At the end of the second year, changes in the school-community relationship were reported for 17 schools in all. The changes reported included the provision of greater opportunities for community education (2 schools), integration of schools into local communities, and development of community spirit (7 schools).

By the end of the third year, coordinators reported and described changes in their schools' role in the community for 81% of schools (n=59). In 18% of schools (n=13), coordinators reported no changes in their schools' role in the community.

Coordinators reported that, since the introduction of the HSCL scheme, schools had a higher profile in the community (13 schools) and were viewed as a resource center by community agencies and members of the community (17 schools). Coordinators in 11 schools reported liaising more with community agencies since the introduction of the HSCL scheme. Coordinators stated that community agencies held meetings in schools (3 schools), had public notices in the school to advertise local activities, events, and courses (3 schools), used school resources (2 schools), and supported the work of HSCL programs in the schools (5 schools).

HSCL programs were perceived by coordinators in 19 schools to have brought about positive changes in that schools were now viewed by community agencies and members of the community as having an important role to play, particularly through the availability of coordinators to attend local meetings. A coordinator serving two schools stated that, since the introduction of the HSCL scheme, a more structured

approach was adopted in coordinating meetings with community agencies.

Furthermore, the coordinator and the community agencies discussed how to work best with the school to broaden, clarify, and develop the role of the school within the community.

### The Impact of HSCL Programs on Teachers

One of the important aspects of the HSCL scheme was the opportunity it afforded teachers to meet and get to know the parents of their pupils. In spite of the fact that the school day is highly structured with very little time for staff to interact even among themselves, the fact that parents were in schools meant that teachers met them, saw them in corridors, and in many cases, worked with them.

In this section, the effects of the HSCL scheme on teachers are examined from the perspectives of coordinators and of teachers themselves.

#### Coordinators' Descriptions of Impact on Teachers

At the end of the second year, the effects of HSCL programs on teachers were described by coordinators in the Annual Progress Records. Coordinators described changes in both teachers' attitudes and behaviors regarding parent involvement in the school. At the end of the third year of the scheme, coordinators reported on the involvement of teachers in various aspects of HSCL programs, on changes in teachers'

attitudes and levels of awareness about various aspects of HSCL programs and parent involvement both at home and in schools.

### Changes in Teachers' Attitudes: Year Two

At the end of the second year, coordinators in 72 schools rated changes in teachers' attitudes towards parent involvement in the school since the HSCL program began. Based on their own judgment and knowledge of staff in the schools they served, coordinators assessed whether the overall attitude of all teachers (in each school served) had become more positive, more negative, or had not changed (see Table 18). Teachers' attitudes towards parent involvement were perceived to have become "much more positive" in 13 schools, "a little more positive" in 39 schools, "not changed" in 10 schools, and "a little more negative" in one school. In no school were teachers' attitudes deemed to have become "much more negative" overall. In general, it is clear that coordinators perceived positive changes in teachers' attitudes towards parent involvement.

Coordinators for 49 schools described specific changes in teachers' attitudes. They perceived teachers to have become more open to parent involvement in the school, less defensive towards parents, less critical of, and more friendly towards parents, less threatened by them, and more open to new ideas and suggestions regarding their involvement in the school.

Table 18

**Coordinator's Ratings of Changes in Teachers' Attitudes  
Toward Parent Involvement in School**

<b>Rating of attitude change</b>	<b>Number of schools (n: 72)</b>
Much more positive	13
A little more positive	39
Not changed	10
A little more negative	1
Much more negative	0
Multiple rating	8
No rating	1

Coordinators for 15 schools reported changes in the attitudes of teachers towards parents as individuals. The changes most frequently reported referred to teachers' greater understanding of parents' backgrounds and of the difficulties they faced, greater consciousness of parents' attitudes and aspirations, and a greater appreciation of parents as individuals with needs and talents of their own rather than just as parents of their pupils. Further, as a result of increased awareness of children's home backgrounds, teachers were reported to show more sympathy and tolerance to children.

Coordinators also noted positive changes in teachers' attitudes towards parent involvement in classrooms. For example, some teachers who initially had reservations

about having parents in classrooms were now perceived to be very pleased with such involvement. Teachers of senior classes had inquired about programs that would involve parents in their classrooms.

Coordinators in nine schools gave reasons why they thought a more positive change in attitudes had not occurred. The reasons included, in order of frequency, the fact that some teachers still had reservations about parent involvement, teachers' lack of opportunity to meet parents, and the fact that teachers who were quite willing to have parents involved were inhibited by the negative attitude of a principal towards parent involvement.

In only one school did a coordinator regard teachers' attitudes towards parent involvement in the school as having become a little more negative overall. This inference was based on the way some teachers criticized the involvement of particular parents.

Difficulty in rating changes in teachers' attitudes was reflected in the multiple ratings offered by coordinators for eight schools. In each case coordinators said that they could not arrive at an overall assessment of changes in teachers' attitudes towards parent involvement that would apply to all teachers, since teachers differed in their attitudes. Thus, in these schools, while some teachers were positive and supportive of the program and of the coordinators' work, others were not or had reservations about parent involvement in schools or in classrooms.

### Changes in Teachers' Attitudes: Year Three

Coordinators' ratings at the end of the third year indicated that, in general, teachers' attitudes towards HSCL programs had become more positive overall. For more than half the schools (54%), teachers' attitudes were reported to be "A little more positive," while for a quarter of schools (25%) teachers were reported to be "Much more positive." In 16% of schools, teachers' attitudes had not changed, while in only 6% of schools were teachers' attitudes deemed to have become more negative.

Coordinators were asked to respond to questions about seven specific aspects of changes in teachers' attitudes and levels of awareness (Table 19). For about two-thirds of schools, coordinators reported that "all" or "most" teachers were more aware than they had been of the coordinator as a resource in the school. For the same number of schools, "all" or "most" teachers were reported to have become more aware of the aims and nature of HSCL programs. In most of the remaining schools, "some" teachers were more aware of the coordinator as a resource and of the aims and nature of HSCL programs. In only a small proportion of schools, coordinators reported that "no teachers" were more aware of the coordinator as a resource (4 schools) or of the aims and nature of the HSCL program (1 school).

In two-thirds of schools, coordinators reported that "all" or "most" teachers had become more aware of parents' role and contribution at home. In only four schools did coordinators feel that none of the teachers was more aware of this. For

**Table 19**  
**Percentages of Schools for Which Coordinators Rated Specified**  
**Aspects of Teachers' Attitudes to the HSCL Program**  
**in Schools During the Third Year**

<b>Teacher attitude</b>	<b>All teachers</b>	<b>Most teachers</b>	<b>Some teachers</b>	<b>No teachers</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>% (n)</b>	<b>% (n)</b>	<b>% (n)</b>	<b>% (n)</b>	<b>(n)</b>
Aware of coordinator as resource	23 (16)	42 (29)	29 (20)	6 (4)	(69)
Aware of HSCL	21 (14)	46 (31)	32 (22)	2 (1)	(68)
Aware of parents role at home	30 (21)	33 (23)	30 (21)	6 (4)	(69)
Positive about parents' role at home	20 (14)	33 (23)	39 (27)	7 (5)	(69)
Tolerant of parents in school	25 (17)	54 (37)	19 (13)	2 (1)	(68)
Positive about parents' role in school	16 (11)	22 (15)	49 (33)	13 (9)	(68)
Aware of parents' role in school	20 (14)	20 (14)	45 (31)	15 (10)	(69)
Always very positive about HSCL	12 (8)	34 (23)	45 (30)	9 (6)	(67)

more than half the schools, coordinators reported that "all" or "most" teachers were more positive about parents' role and contribution at home. This was also true for "some" teachers in 39% of schools, while in only 7% of schools coordinators reported that "no teachers" were more positive about parents' role and contribution at home.



In general, during the third year, coordinators reported that “all” or “most” teachers had become more tolerant of parents' presence in school (79% of schools). There was only one school for which this was not the case and in the remaining 13 schools “some” teachers had become more tolerant. In 40% of schools, coordinators reported that “all” or “most” teachers had become more aware of parents' role and contribution in school, and this was true of “some” teachers in 45% of schools. However, in 15% of schools, coordinators reported that no teacher was more aware of parents' role and contribution in school.

Coordinators perceived teachers to be slightly less positive about parents' role and contribution in school than they were about parents' role and contribution in the home. For 38% of schools “all” or “most” teachers were reported to be more positive about this aspect of HSCL programs. For almost half the schools only “some” teachers were reported to be more positive about parents' role and contribution in school, while for 13% of schools “no teachers” were reported to be more positive about this.

In their rating of teachers' attitudes towards the HSCL program in the Annual Progress Record during the second year, coordinators commented that it was difficult to rate a number of teachers as having become more positive since they had always been very positive towards HSCL. In light of these comments, in the Annual Progress Record for the third year, coordinators were asked to rate the extent to which teachers were “always very positive about HSCL” (Table 19). There were valid

responses for 67 schools. For almost half (45%) of those schools, coordinators reported that “all” or “most” teachers had always been very positive about HSCL. However, for more than half (53%) the schools, only “some” teachers (30 schools) or “no teachers” (6 schools) had always been very positive about HSCL.

To take account of the fact that many teachers were regarded as having always been positive about HSCL programs and thus provide a better assessment of the extent to which teachers had changed their attitudes, coordinators' responses to the item “Teachers were always very positive about HSCL” were crossed with responses to the seven more specific items, the responses to which were described above. The procedure involved calculating the number of schools in three categories for each of the seven items, having taken account of their responses to the item relating to being “always very positive.” The categories were: (1) the number of schools that had received a more positive rating (i.e., indicating that “all” teachers rather than “most” teachers or “some” teachers, or “most” teachers rather than “some” teachers, were perceived to have changed) on the specific item than on the “always very positive” item; (2) the number of schools that had received a more negative rating (i.e., indicating that “some” teachers rather than “most” teachers, or “all” teachers or “most” teachers rather than “all” teachers, were perceived to have changed) on the specific item than on the “always very positive” item; (3) the number of schools in which there was no difference in the rating which they received on the specific item and on the “always very positive” item.

Chi-square analyses of the data generated indicated that there were significant differences on all the items (Table 20). In 29 schools, coordinators' ratings of teachers' awareness of the coordinator as a resource did not change. Very few teachers were less aware, however. Similarly, coordinators in 27 schools reported no change in teachers' awareness of the aims and nature of the HSCL program, while in remaining schools, few teachers became less aware of the aims and nature of the HSCL program.

Coordinators reported that teachers had become more aware of parents' roles and contributions at home. In the case of teachers' attitudes towards parents' role and contribution at home, coordinators' ratings indicated that such attitudes either had not changed or at any rate had not become more negative.

Coordinators perceived that teachers had become more tolerant of parents' presence in schools; very few teachers were perceived to have developed negative attitudes in this regard. However, the number of schools in which coordinators' ratings of teachers' awareness of parents' role and contribution in school did not change was significantly greater than the number of schools in which coordinators ratings of teachers awareness actually did change . A similar result was found for teachers' attitudes towards parents' role and contribution in school.

Table 20

Numbers of Schools in Which Teachers' Attitudes  
to HSCL and Parents Had Changed

Teacher attitude	Became more positive	Became less positive	No change	$\chi^2$ (df:2)	p
Aware of coordinator as resource	29	9	29	11.95	**
Aware of HSCL	31	9	27	12.38	**
Aware of parents' role at home	32	9	26	12.76	**
Positive about parents' role at home	22	12	33	9.89	**
Tolerant of parents in school	37	4	26	25.32	**
Aware of parents' role in school	17	16	34	9.18	*
Positive about parents' role in school	15	19	33	8.01	*

\*significant at .05 level

\*\*significant at .01 level

#### Changes in Teachers' Behaviors Regarding Parent Involvement

At the end of the second year, coordinators in 48 schools reported positive behaviors of teachers regarding parent involvement. Teachers in 27 schools had involved parents in their classroom. In three of these schools, coordinators mentioned that there had been an increase in the numbers of teachers who had parents in their classrooms during the second year.

Coordinators also reported positive behaviors of teachers outside their own classroom (20 schools). This evidence varied in its specificity. Some coordinators merely stated that teachers were involved in HSCL activities (3 schools) or helped set up HSCL activities (1 school). Others specified that teachers had involved parents in paired-reading (3 schools) or in extra-curricular activities, i.e., book fair, school play, school tour, swimming (11 schools), had put the coordinator in touch with a facilitator for a personal development course for parents (1 school), and had offered to give mathematics classes to parents (1 school). Other reported behaviors implied less direct teacher involvement with the HSCL program (14 schools). For example, teachers offered new ideas for the program (1 school), visited the parents' room socially (1 school), asked coordinators to liaise with homes (4 schools), or simply made less negative comments about the program or about parent involvement (3 schools).

For more than half the primary schools, coordinators reported that “all” or “most” teachers had more informal interactions with parents in the school during the third year than previously (Table 21). This was also true for “some” teachers in 44% of schools. In only two schools did coordinators report that this was true of “no teachers.”

Teachers involved parents in their school work in various ways during the third year. Involvement ranged from accompanying children to swimming, covering school

Table 21

Percentages of Schools for Which Teachers Were Reported to Have Been Involved in Specified Aspects of HSCL Programs in Schools During the Third Year

Percentages of schools (n:72)				
	All teachers	Most teachers	Some teachers	No teachers
Teacher activity	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
More informal interactions with parents in school	20 (14)	33 (23)	44 (30)	3 (2)
Involved parents in their school work	1 (1)	13 (9)	54 (38)	31 (22)
Helped with HSCL	6 (4)	9 (6)	53 (36)	32 (22)
Gave suggestions about HSCL	12 (8)	16 (11)	52 (36)	20 (14)

books, yard duty, and making costumes for concerts, to paired-reading, assisting with math, reading, or computer activities, infant activities, and teaching knitting or cookery to older pupils.

In 14% of schools, “all” or “most” teachers had involved parents in their school work in various ways. This was also true of “some” teachers in more than half the schools. However, in almost a third of schools “no teachers” had involved parents in their school work.

Coordinators reported that teachers also helped out with HSCL activities. These included (in order of frequency) paired reading (15 schools), art and crafts (6 schools), parent talks (5 schools), and library activities (5 schools). In six schools, teachers ran classes for parents (drama, cookery, computers, basic math, and choir) and one teacher also did home visits.

For over half the schools, “some” teachers (sometimes as few as one) were involved. However, for a small proportion (6%) of schools, “all” teachers were involved, mostly in Christmas parties and group meetings with parents. For a further 9% of schools, “most” teachers were involved, while for almost a third, “no teachers” were involved in HSCL activities.

From coordinators' responses, it would seem that, at the end of the third year, teachers were more likely to offer advice and suggestions about HSCL than they were at the outset of the scheme. In 28% of schools, “all” or “most” teachers had done this, while in more than half the schools “some” teachers had offered advice or suggestions. In one-fifth of schools “no teachers” had done this. Coordinators reported that teachers had responded to questionnaires (2 schools), discussed HSCL at staff meetings (2 schools), and had proposed activities they would like (e.g., sewing class, book club, course for parents of disruptive children, toy library, discussion of school discipline with parents). Teachers were also helpful in indicating parents to target and, in one school, they offered ideas on how to contact community groups.

### Teachers' Descriptions of Impact on Teachers

At the end of the second year of the HSCL scheme, 96 teachers in the six selected schools were asked about the impact of HSCL programs on them. Their responses are described under five headings: benefits to teachers of parent involvement in activities; benefits of the coordinator as support for the teacher; teachers' perceptions of changes in role as class teacher as a result of HSCL programs; the circumstances under which teachers would be willing to have parents involved in classroom-based activities in the future; and difficulties with parent involvement.

#### Benefits to Teachers of Parent Involvement in Activities

Teachers felt that parent involvement in activities in school helped both themselves and parents to get to know and understand each other better. Through informal meetings, teachers and parents had begun to see each other as ordinary people and as individuals rather than as members of a group. This was particularly true when parents and teachers worked together in the classroom. Teachers indicated how they had gradually become less wary of parents when they realized that parents were there to help and not to criticize. They also became aware of and appreciated what parents could contribute. They saw how parents' skills and talents (e.g., in art and crafts, computer activities), could be useful to the teacher and how teachers might even learn from parents in some instances. Teachers suggested that parents had come to understand the difficulties in dealing with large numbers of pupils and that parents



could also see how their own children behaved in class, how they reacted to another adult, and the problems they might cause the teacher. Teachers also suggested that parents had begun to realize that teachers care about their pupils and had gained some understanding of what teachers are trying to achieve in schools.

With improved parent-teacher relations, teachers reported that problems became easier to deal with, and parents were easier to contact. One teacher described how an open meeting with all the parents in her class had first been difficult as parents were very defensive, but eventually resulted in discussion and sharing of ideas. Another teacher attributed improved attendance at her parent-teacher meetings to the increased involvement of parents in activities in the school.

At a more general level, teachers suggested that if parents are involved in and enjoy activities in school then they are more likely to be involved with children at home and to support the teacher's work. It was clear from teachers' comments, however, that support for the teacher was more obvious and more practical if parents were involved in classroom-based activities. A major benefit to teachers accrued when the number of pupils they had to deal with was reduced when parents took children for computer activities, for junior infant activities, or for reading or writing. These practices allowed the teacher to give individual attention to "weaker" pupils. Teachers found such assistance particularly useful when children were being taught a new concept, when the presence of a parent to monitor the progress of most children allowed the teacher to repeat the concept with "weaker" pupils. At other times it was

the parent who worked or played (e.g., stories, jigsaws, word games) with “weaker” pupils leaving the teacher free to concentrate on activities with the rest of the class. When parents helped in class with activities such as art and crafts or knitting, the children got to do a lot more than they would have without the assistance of the parent. Parents' assistance eased the workload of the teacher so that teachers frequently described the help of the parent in terms of “an extra pair of hands.” Teachers also derived a sense of support from knowing that a group of parents was available and willing to help on request.

Paired reading was one activity which involved parents that teachers would not normally see, i.e., parents who may not have been willing to participate in activities in the school. Teachers considered parent participation in paired reading as a support to their work in school. Some teachers pointed out that they would prefer activities that involved greater support from parents at home (e.g., encouraging parents to ensure that children did their homework) rather than having parents involved in activities in school.

#### Benefits of the Coordinator as Support for the Teacher

More than half the teachers interviewed (n=52) made reference to either the benefits of having the coordinator as a backup or support (n=42) or mentioned this as an aspect of the coordinator's role (n=31).

Through home visits, the coordinator provided teachers with information on the background of children and teachers reported that this had helped them to understand the child better and to cope more effectively with the child in class. The availability of the coordinator to visit the homes of problem children took a lot of pressure off the teacher in addressing problems with difficult, disruptive, or troublesome children and in dealing with cases of non-attendance. Teachers also emphasized that, with the coordinator as support, they could share the responsibility of problem cases and that everything that could be done for the children was being done. One teacher mentioned how much it meant to her to have the support of the coordinator on the occasion of taking one child from her class to see a psychiatrist. Teachers also found the coordinator's availability invaluable in explaining teachers' perspectives to parents in the home and in reaching parents that they would not normally see.

The approach of following up on disruptive children suggests an "emergency" service that was not in keeping with the preventative philosophy of the HSCL scheme. While coordinators were discouraged from providing this service, at times they found that some such activity was necessary, if only because of its obvious positive impact on teachers.

Teachers' Perceptions of Changes in Role as a Result of the HSCL Scheme

Teachers were asked if there had been any changes in their role as class teacher as a result of the HSCL scheme. Most teachers (n=57) did not perceive a change in their role as class teacher. Others (n=32) felt that there had been a change in their role as a result of the scheme, while some teachers (n=6) reported that a new dimension had been added to their work in the school but they did not see this as a change in their role as class teacher (Table 22).

Table 22

Number of Teachers Who Indicated a Change in  
Their Role as a Result of the HSCL Scheme

Role change	Total (n: 96)
No change in role as class teacher	57
Change in role as class teacher	32
New dimension to work but not a change in role as class teacher	6
Question not applicable to teacher	1

Of the 32 teachers who perceived a change in their role, 23 referred to their involvement in activities with parents. The changes which they described related almost exclusively to classroom-based activities with parents (mostly in two schools) and the changes were generally described in terms of the implications of that involvement for them. For example, having a parent involved in classroom-based

activities introduced additional responsibilities for the teacher such as sitting down with parents to explain junior infant activities, training parents for involvement in the classroom, and organizing parent-child activities. Having a parent in class also meant that the teacher had to learn how to cope with disciplining a child when the child's parent was present and how to allow a parent a certain amount of autonomy within the classroom. Other implications for the teacher of parent involvement in classroom-based activities included greater and better parent contact and greater awareness of the home dimension of children's lives.

Teachers' reactions to changes in their role arising from parent involvement in classroom-based activities were mostly positive. Fourteen teachers were completely positive in their reactions and described feeling more approachable as a teacher and more comfortable about asking parents to come into class. They also noted that children enjoyed the attention of another adult, looked forward to a parent coming into class, and, in one case, a child gained confidence through his parent reading to him in class. Three teachers, who had initially felt threatened by the thought of a parent in class, reported being pleased about it. A fourth teacher, while she felt that parent involvement created extra pressure in class, was positive about that involvement as she felt less isolated than previously and each child in her class was now read to every day. Five teachers were somewhat negative about parent involvement and the changes it had brought for them, feeling that it put more pressure on teachers, that teachers did not have time for it, and that it was generally difficult to have parents in class. Two

teachers were neither positive nor negative about the changes, describing parent involvement in the classroom as a new experience and simply as “an extra pair of hands.”

Most teachers who saw no changes in their role as class teacher as a result of HSCL programs did not explain their responses. However, of those that did, seven were not involved in activities with parents and five were. The reasons given by teachers who were involved but who saw no change in their role included the fact that they had been involved with parents prior to the HSCL program (n=3) and that, despite having a parent in class, the teacher was still the boss and was respected by parents as the one in charge (n=2).

While most teachers who had parents involved in the classroom (23 of 29) perceived this as affecting their role as class teacher, only eight of the many teachers who used the coordinator as a support or back-up reported a change in their role. Clearly, having a parent involved in the classroom was a much more fundamental change for the teacher and aroused more mixed feelings than using the coordinator as a back-up or support. Indeed, of all the activities introduced through the HSCL scheme, parent involvement in the classroom proved the most controversial. One-third of the 96 teachers interviewed stated that they were not willing to have parents involved in classroom-based activities in the future. These teachers described a feeling of threat to their professionalism, concern that parents would become over-familiar and over-confident, and concerns about breaches in confidentiality. However, despite

the difficulties that parent involvement in the classroom obviously posed for some teachers, the remaining two-thirds were open to the idea of such involvement in the future. Indeed, 26 of these teachers had already involved parents in their classrooms. Only 3 of the 29 teachers who had parents involved in their classrooms were not willing to do so in the future because of the added pressure it had brought to their work.

#### Teachers' Conditions for Classroom Involvement of Parents

Teachers differed considerably in terms of the type of parent involvement they would allow in the classroom. Some would limit parents to a supervisory role and suggested that a parent's contribution should be confined to helping with activities such as knitting or art and craft activities. Many teachers would not like to see parent involvement in more academic activities as they felt that parents would be more likely to make comparisons between children in relation to reading, writing, and math than they would in relation to other activities. Some teachers felt that parent involvement in academic work was suited only to junior classes and thought that a role for parents was less obvious in senior classes. On the other hand, one teacher suggested that if parent involvement in the classroom began with junior level classes, it would work itself naturally up through the school. Other suggestions by teachers included having parents come in to describe their work, asking parents with knowledge of local history

or geography to talk to children, or having parents show articles or objects they had made or explain things learned in courses in the school.

Teachers involved in activities with parents in the classroom and other teachers interested in such involvement pointed to the need for guidelines to be developed within the school in order for parent involvement to be effective. Some guidelines suggested by teachers were:

1. Teachers need inservice training to cope with parent involvement in the classroom. One teacher suggested that in providing this training the experience of teachers who have worked with parents in the classroom should be examined. Teachers need reassurance from other teachers that their position will not be threatened. It should also be recognized that some teachers would find it stressful to have a parent in the classroom and that, until a teacher is prepared to have a parent in class, no attempt should be made to impose parents.
2. Parents need to be trained and their role in class adequately defined so that it does not infringe on the role of the teacher. A role suggested by some teachers was that of teacher's aide. Parents should feel competent about what they are to do in class.
3. An agreement on discipline between parents and teachers is needed. Teachers who have been involved with parents in class mentioned the initial strain of having a parent present and the fear of disciplining their child. This aspect should be



included in training for teachers and parents in preparation for parent involvement in class.

4. An agreed process of parent selection is required to avoid jealousy or other difficulties among parents. Parents need to be carefully selected by school staff. One of the most important qualities for a parent is consistency in attendance. Teachers also need to be sure that a parent will maintain the confidentiality of classroom matters.

5. There should be a good working relationship between the parent and the teacher.

6. Parent involvement in the classroom works best for small-group activities.

7. Teachers should be provided with some evidence of the effectiveness of parent involvement in the classroom.

#### Difficulties With Parent Involvement as Described by Teachers

While two-thirds of teachers reported a willingness to have parents involved in classroom-based activities in the future, a quarter reported difficulties with the idea. Objections were strongest in relation to parent involvement in the classroom, but teachers also had difficulties with general parent involvement in the school. Some teachers, particularly teachers who were not involved in program activities, felt overwhelmed by the presence of parents in the school because of lack of understanding of what was happening and lack of preparation and training for involvement. Other fears expressed related to undermining of teachers'

professionalism, fears about parents taking over, and parents perceiving the teacher's job as too easy. In this context, having parents in the classroom was seen as an extra burden or pressure. Teachers also emphasized that both parents and teachers need their own space (i.e., staff room, parents' room) within the school.

Teachers expressed the need for staff development and training to cope with the introduction of parents into schools. At a more basic level, they requested a persuasive rationale for parent involvement in schools or classrooms and a description of their potential contributions.

### The Impact of HSCL Programs on Pupils

Since effects at pupil level would be likely to be long-term, neither coordinators nor teachers were asked directly to describe or rate the effects of HSCL programs on pupils during the first two years of the scheme. However, in the Annual Progress Records for the second year, some coordinators included effects on children when describing advantages of the HSCL scheme, changes in schools and homes, and effects on teachers. Thus, while the numbers of schools in which effects on children were adverted to may seem small ( $n=19$ ), the fact that coordinators raised this issue would seem to imply that the effects were somewhat obvious. In the second year, during interviews with them, teachers in six selected schools also described effects on children, primarily in the context of parent involvement in the school and in the classroom. In Annual Progress Records for the third year, coordinators were asked to

rate specific aspects of effects on pupils. Interviews with fifth grade pupils in the six schools at the end of the second year also provided some evidence of effects.

#### Coordinators' Perceptions of the Effects of HSCL Programs on Children's Attitudes and Behavior

In describing general effects of the HSCL scheme during the second year, coordinators serving a total of 19 schools reported some positive impact on children's behavior or attitudes.

Effects of the scheme on children's behavior were reported for six schools and included improved school attendance. One coordinator, who served two schools, reported that she had observed better behavior among certain disruptive pupils when their parents were on the premises. In another school, the coordinator reported that children who were involved in a paired-reading program had made progress in reading.

Effects of the scheme on children's attitudes were reported for 13 schools. Coordinators perceived children to have more pride in their work (in 1 school) and in themselves (3 schools) as a result of the scheme. Some teachers in other schools also indicated that children had more pride in their work, stating that parent involvement had made children more responsible regarding schoolwork. Coordinators in two schools thought that children saw themselves as more important people and felt respected when their homes were visited for any reason. Perhaps this also explains why children in two other schools were perceived to be "happier."

Coordinators reported that children were now more used to seeing parents around the school as an everyday event (1 school) and that they accepted parents in the classroom (1 school). Because of their parents' involvement in the school, children could see that parents and teachers were working together (2 schools). As a result, children in one school were aware that they may now be caught out if they tried to play teacher off against parent as they had in the past. Teachers also made this point during interviews.

At the end of the third year, coordinators' reports for 73 primary schools pointed to changes mainly in "some" pupils (Table 23). In some instances this could mean as few as one or two pupils with whom either the coordinator, remedial teacher, or some other person had intervened directly. However, in relation to improvements in behavior and attendance in particular, it should be remembered that it is generally small numbers of pupils that are consistently problematic. It is not surprising, therefore, that for over four-fifths of schools, coordinators reported improvements in behavior and attendance for "some" pupils.

For about one-fifth of schools, coordinators reported that "most" pupils had experienced a more positive environment within the school and that their view of school, of their parents, and of their own work had been enhanced. This would seem to be a very positive step overall.

Table 23

**Percentages of Schools for Which Coordinators Reported Changes  
in Pupils Regarding Specified Aspects of the HSCL Program  
in Schools During the Third Year**

<b>Pupils . . .</b>	<b>All pupils</b>	<b>Most pupils</b>	<b>Some pupils</b>	<b>No pupils</b>
	<b>% (n)</b>	<b>% (n)</b>	<b>% (n)</b>	<b>% (n)</b>
were better behaved in school	0 (0)	9 (6)	87 (59)	4 (3)
had increased attendance at school	0 (0)	5 (3)	84 (56)	12 (8)
had a more positive experience of school	0 (0)	19 (13)	74 (51)	7 (5)
had a more positive attitude to school	2 (1)	21 (14)	71 (48)	7 (5)
had a more positive attitude toward own parents	0 (0)	19 (12)	71 (46)	11 (7)
had more pride in themselves and in their own work	2 (1)	21 (14)	72 (48)	6 (4)
received more practical help with school work	2 (1)	10 (6)	76 (44)	12 (7)
showed improvement in school attainment	0 (0)	7 (4)	78 (46)	15 (9)

Coordinators reported that in a majority (88%) of schools pupils had received more practical help with school work. This was true for “some” pupils in over three-quarters (76%) of schools, for “most” pupils in 10% of schools, and for “all” pupils in

one school. The main aspect of this activity included increased involvement in reading activities (18 schools) mainly through paired-reading programs. Coordinators reported that courses in math in 10 schools had enabled parents to help their children, and that there had been increased parent involvement with homework (including homework clubs) in eight schools.

For over three-quarters (78%) of schools, coordinators reported that “some” pupils showed improvements in school attainment. The improvements referred to were mostly in reading and were mainly related to the operation of paired-reading activities or programs in schools. However, no evidence was available to corroborate this.

#### Teachers' Perceptions of the Benefits to Children of Parent Involvement

Teachers described the benefits to children of parent involvement in terms of a more positive experience of school, a more positive attitude towards school, and some educational benefits.

Teachers suggested that children's self-esteem was improved by seeing parents as positive role models and as competent individuals who have skills as good as if not better than, teachers (e.g., art and crafts, knitting, music). They stated that children benefited from having a person in the classroom or in the school with whom they could identify as well as from the realization that their parents had a role to play outside the home. They believed that children were beginning to develop confidence

in their parents as “teachers” or “helpers with homework” that they did not previously have. This view was supported by the comments of fifth-grade pupils, some of whom stated that their parents would be better able to help them with homework as a result of involvement in school-related activities (e.g., math and Irish classes).

Teachers also observed that children enjoyed school more and loved to have parents around the school, particularly in the classroom. The presence of a parent brought new life to the classroom, children got to see a new face and to relate to another adult. It should be noted that comments relating to parents in the classroom applied mostly to junior level classes (i.e., from junior infants to second grade) as this kind of parent involvement was confined almost exclusively to these classes. The majority of the fifth-grade pupils interviewed were not in favor of parent involvement in the classroom although some of them thought that involvement would be acceptable as long as it was not their own parents who were involved. Pupils stated that it would be embarrassing if parents were involved, particularly if they “got caught out on something.”

Apart from parent involvement in the classroom, another parent activity which teachers considered to have added variety to the children's school day was that of parents taking children out of class for an activity e.g., computer activities. In this way children got a chance to participate in an activity outside the normal school routine, an activity that would not be possible without the assistance of parents.

Teachers suggested that children began to look on school more positively when they saw parents and teachers working together, when they saw the school welcoming, trusting, and respecting their parents, and valuing their contribution. Teachers also suggested that children would begin to put a greater value on education when they saw parents involved in school and participating in education themselves (i.e., attending classes and courses).

Few teachers saw any immediate effect of parent involvement on pupils' scholastic performance and most felt that such effects would take longer to emerge. Paired reading was one activity recognized by teachers as stimulating parents' interest and enthusiasm. Teachers who had been involved in paired-reading programs (n=14) were very positive about this procedure as a means of enhancing pupils' learning. A remedial teacher stated that the children in her class had improved as a result of a paired-reading program. Another teacher described the value of paired reading as allowing pupils to take home books that would stimulate their imaginations.

It is clear from teachers' comments that the main benefit to pupils of parents' involvement in the classroom was the increased individual attention they received during a variety of activities (e.g., reading, writing, math, art and crafts, knitting). However, children also benefited from special activities. One example of this was where a parent came in to read "nice" books to children and the children were given the opportunity to give their ideas on these books. In terms of a specific activity, such as a homework club, children got help with their homework that they would not



normally get. One teacher indicated that the children selected for the club were those that most needed help (i.e., weaker children who would normally do homework alone or not at all). The teacher trained the parents who were to supervise the club. While they could help the children with their homework, they were not to do the homework for the children. In other instances, however, parents involved in the homework club acted only in a supervisory capacity.

#### Pupils' Reports on HSCL Programs

At the end of the second year, a sample of fifth-grade pupils from five of the six selected schools (one of the schools was a junior school with no fifth-grade) was interviewed to obtain information relating to their knowledge of their parents' involvement in the HSCL program in their school. Pupils were asked about the involvement of both their mothers and fathers and about their attitudes to their parents' involvement in school-related activities.

The number of fifth-grade pupils in each school ranged from 22 to 103 and, accordingly, the number of class groups ranged from one class (in three schools) to three classes (in two schools) (see Table 24). Three of the schools were single-sex schools (two boys and one girls) and two schools were mixed. The largest school was a boys' school with 103 pupils in fifth grade and the girls' school was smallest with only 22 fifth-grade pupils.

**Table 24**  
**Number and Distribution of Fifth-Grade Pupils in**  
**Five of the Six Selected Schools\***

School	Type of School	Number of fifth-grade pupils	Number of classes	Number of pupils interviewed	
				Male	Female
A	Mixed	26	1	6	3
B	Mixed	81	3	12	12
C	Boys	103	3	27	--
D	Girls	22	1	--	9
E	Boys	35	1	9	--

\*One of the six selected schools was a junior school with no fifth grade.

Nine pupils from each class were interviewed with the exception of the large mixed school in which eight pupils per class (12 boys and 12 girls) were interviewed in order to maintain an even number of pupils of each sex. Altogether 78 pupils (54 boys and 24 girls) were interviewed.

Most pupils in two of the schools said that their mothers were involved in school-related activities. In the other three schools, about a third of pupils said that their parents were involved. The main reasons for non-involvement related to family responsibilities (e.g., looking after a child).

Pupils in four schools indicated that their parents were involved in classes in mathematics while pupils in three schools said their parents attended Irish classes.

Other activities of which pupils were aware included art and crafts, cookery, a toy library, and helping in infant classes.

Only two pupils said that their fathers had been involved in HSCL activities. The most frequently given reason for non-involvement was the father's work.

Pupils were divided in their attitudes to parents' involvement. Some thought it was a good thing. In particular, pupils saw an advantage in their mothers' attendance at classes in mathematics and Irish. Positive attitudes to involvement arose most frequently from pupils' perceptions of their parents' ability to help them with homework. In other cases, pupils perceived parent involvement as contributing to the parents' well-being. For example, pupils felt it was good for mothers to get out and meet other people. They also noted that mothers enjoyed the activities.

A number of pupils were not enthusiastic about their parents' involvement. Others were indifferent. Several drew the line for involvement at the classroom door. Although there were exceptions, pupils in general were not in favor of having parents (particularly their own) involved in their classroom. The reason most frequently given for this was that pupils would be embarrassed.

Although fathers were not involved in formal HSCL activities, they were the most frequently mentioned helpers when pupils were asked about assistance with homework. Mothers and older sisters were also mentioned. However, information from mothers interviewed did not support this.

## The Impact of HSCL Programs on Parents

This section contains a description of the impact of HSCL programs on parents. Information presented is from meetings with groups of parents in some schools during the first year, from coordinators' Annual Progress Records in 72 schools during the second year, and from interviews with teachers in the six selected primary schools during the second year.

### Parents' Own Views in the First Year

Where groups of parents were available in schools (during site visits), they were asked their views about the HSCL scheme. Therefore, only parents (all mothers) who had some involvement in HSCL programs were asked about the HSCL scheme. The response from these parents was overwhelmingly positive. Among the benefits they identified were development of their self-confidence and self-esteem, enjoyment of courses and of their involvement in the school, increased understanding of what was happening in schools and of the difficulties which teachers faced, increased interest in their children's education and in acquiring the skills to participate in this process, and increased enjoyment of reading for children. They also noted that the fact that they were helping children with their homework reduced the frustration level of the children. Parents were happy that a contact person was available in the school and that schools and teachers were more accessible to them. Fears they had regarding schools were diminishing. There was also mention of an increase in community spirit

and pride as a result of the collaborative efforts of schools, parents, and community groups.

While these observations on the role of parents in the scheme are positive and encouraging, they have to be set against the fact that, during the first year, only a small proportion of parents were involved in the programs in schools. Parents themselves provided some suggestions as to the possible reasons for this. They suggested that personal problems, lack of money, shyness, work commitments, lack of facilities for small children, lack of understanding of the scheme and what would be expected of them, lack of information about HSCL activities, fear and uncertainty regarding schools, illiteracy, and lack of interest as problems that would potentially prevent parents from becoming involved in HSCL activities. Coordinators had adopted various measures to address these problems (e.g., home visits, correspondence, phone calls, encouragement by other parents, provision of courses to arouse interest).

#### Coordinators' Descriptions of Effects on Parents

In the Annual Progress Records for the second year of the scheme, coordinators in 72 schools described effects of HSCL programs on parents in terms of the following: personal development of parents; parents' involvement in their children's education; changes in parents' attitudes; and changes in parents' behavior.

### Personal Development of Parents

Coordinators in 50 schools perceived benefits to parents' personal development as a result of HSCL programs. Some based their reports on comments made by parents, others on their own observation of changes in parents.

From coordinators' descriptions it would seem that the effects of HSCL programs on parents' personal development were due primarily to parents' involvement in courses. The effects that were reported included improved self-confidence, parenting skills, practical home management skills, parent support networks, and coping skills.

Coordinators in 26 schools reported that parents' confidence had improved as a result of their involvement in HSCL programs. They believed that parents had more confidence in themselves as people, in their own skills and abilities, and in their role as educators of their children. Parents were perceived to have developed more positive attitudes to learning, which it was felt would have a good effect on children's learning.

Coordinators in 13 schools reported that parenting skills had improved. Parents were perceived to have become more conscious of the needs and feelings of their children (2 schools) and more aware of good parenting practices to guide children's behavior (4 schools). Parents (in 3 schools) told the coordinator that they were getting along better with their teenage and younger children as a result of skills learned during Parenting/Know Your Child courses. In four schools, coordinators

believed that parents were using more responsible and effective parenting skills, for example, trying new ways of disciplining children.

Improvements in parents' practical home management skills were reported for 12 schools. In three of these schools, children told coordinators that their mothers were more adventurous with food recipes as a result of courses in cookery.

Coordinators in a further six schools reported that children's diet had improved.

Coordinators in 11 schools reported that mutual support networks had begun to develop among parents. Through their involvement in HSCL programs, parents were getting to know each other, making friends, and sharing problems. Thus, parents were seen to be breaking the isolation that surrounded them and beginning to realize that they were not alone in problem situations since help was available from other parents and from the coordinator and school.

Finally, coordinators reported that parents' coping skills had improved. Parents were perceived by coordinators to have become more assertive, to have started taking responsibility for their own lives (2 schools), and to be able to handle ongoing problems in the home more effectively (3 schools). Perhaps it was for this reason that many women in two other schools (served by one coordinator) were considered to be happier people. A coordinator who served two schools reported that, since parents had new interests and outlets, they were more positive in the home and their lives were being enhanced.

### Parents' Involvement in Their Children's Education

Coordinators in all of the 72 primary schools reported effects of HSCL programs on parents' involvement in their children's education. The effects were described in terms of the opportunities that the scheme provided for parent involvement in education, changes in parents' attitudes towards parent involvement in the school, and changes in parents' behavior regarding involvement in their children's education.

Coordinators in nine schools stated that the HSCL scheme was seen to be making a public statement about the role of parents in the school and was providing an outlet for parents who had always wanted to be involved in the school but had previously not had the opportunity.

Coordinators in a further 12 schools were more specific in describing the opportunities for parents' involvement in their children's education which HSCL programs provided. They believed that parents saw them as positive, non-threatening figures, as supportive allies and friends whom they could trust, and as helping to open up the school to parents. They believed also that parents saw them as a contact person in the school, someone who listened to their point of view and valued their input and, that as a result, parents were becoming less alienated from the school.



### Changes in Parents' Attitudes

Coordinators were asked to rate changes in parents' attitudes towards parent involvement in the school on a five-point scale from "much more positive" to "much more negative." Coordinators perceived parents' attitudes towards this kind of involvement to have become "much more positive" in 34 schools and "a little more positive" in 35 schools (Table 25). In three schools, coordinators reported that there was no change in parents' attitudes but for one of these it was explained that parents' attitudes towards involvement in the school had always been positive and that the program had added momentum to this. In no school were parents' attitudes perceived to have become more negative.

Coordinators serving 25 schools gave what they regarded as evidence of attitude change, with many coordinators reporting more than one example. Most frequently, parents were perceived to have a new interest in what happened at their child's school (11 schools), to be more aware of the working of the school (8 schools), and to have a greater understanding of the classroom situation and related problems (8 schools). Parents had become more aware of the importance of their own role in their children's education, more confident about helping children with homework, and realized that they had skills that were of benefit to their children at school. Parents were beginning to feel that they "had a say" in the school and had more confidence in coming to the school to see the coordinator and individual teachers.

Table 25

**Coordinator's Ratings of Changes in Parents' Attitudes  
Toward Parent Involvement in School**

Rating of attitude change	Number of schools (n: 72)
Much more positive	34
A little more positive	35
No change	3
A little more negative	0
Much more negative	0

Coordinators in some schools reported a change in parents' perception of the school or school staff. Parents had begun to realize that the school cared about children and parents as individuals and felt more welcome in the school. Because they felt that they could communicate with teachers, they were more inclined to come to the school. As a result, coordinators believed that parents had more trust in the school and felt a closer relationship with it. In a few schools coordinators reported that parents had developed some sense of ownership of the school, referring to it as "our school." Finally, coordinators reported that parents were becoming aware of the school as a resource for themselves and for the parish.

During the third year of the HSCL scheme, coordinators rated parents' attitudes to HSCL programs in their schools as having become generally more positive. For the overwhelming majority of schools (97%), parents' attitudes were

rated as having become “a little more positive” (51%) or “much more positive” (46%).

There were no schools in which coordinators felt that parents' attitudes had become more negative and only two in which parents' attitudes were judged not to have changed.

Coordinators also reported on more specific aspects of changes in parents' attitude (Table 26). It is encouraging to note that for none of the schools did coordinators feel there were any parents who had not undergone at least some change in attitude towards or understanding of a variety of aspects of HSCL programs. For over half (52%) the schools, coordinators reported that “most” parents had felt less threatened by school and teachers. This was also true of “some” parents in 47% of schools and of “all” parents in one school.

Coordinators reported that in 60% of schools “some” parents had a new interest in what happened in school, while in 39% of schools this was true of “most” parents and in one school of “all” parents.

In a majority (58%) of schools, “most” parents were reported as perceiving the coordinator as a resource for them and in 39% of schools this was true of “some” parents.

Parents were also perceived to have become more aware of the importance of their own role in their child's education. This was the case for “some” parents in almost two-thirds (63%) of schools and for “most” or “all” parents in the remaining

Table 26

**Percentages of Schools for Which Coordinators Reported Changes  
in Parents' Attitudes Toward or Understanding of Specified  
Aspects of the HSCL Program During the Third Year**

Parents . . .	All parents	Most parents	Some parents	No parents
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
felt less threatened by school and teachers	1 (1)	52 (37)	47 (33)	0 (0)
had a new interest in what happened in the school	1 (1)	39 (28)	60 (43)	0 (0)
viewed coordinator as resource for them	3 (2)	58 (42)	39 (28)	0 (0)
were more aware of their contribution to child's education	1 (1)	35 (25)	63 (45)	0 (0)
were more confident about helping child with schoolwork	0 (0)	10 (7)	90 (64)	0 (0)

schools (n=25). Coordinators reported that "some" parents in 90% of schools and "most" parents in a tenth of schools were confident in helping their child with schoolwork.

### Changes in Parents' Behavior

Positive behaviors of parents as a result of HSCL programs were reported for 63 schools in the second year. These were described in terms of parents' enthusiasm for involvement in the school and parents' involvement in their children's schoolwork.

The most frequently reported positive behavior of parents was their enthusiasm to be involved in school activities (28 schools). In some schools parents asked to help teachers rather than being asked, came forward with suggestions, and were willing to give up their time to volunteer for HSCL activities.

An increase in parents' presence in the school were reported by coordinators in 17 schools. While some coordinators merely noted that there were "more parents around the school," others elaborated, commenting for example, that parents now had a definite purpose in the school, that more parents were coming to the school by choice rather than being sent for, that more parents dropped in to the parents' room or called to chat to teachers in their classrooms, that some parents who previously would not linger in the school now did so regularly, and that parents called in simply because they were passing by. Increased attendance at activities in the school was reported for 13 schools.

Other positive changes in parent behavior related to parents' increased involvement in their children's schoolwork. Coordinators reported that, as a result of HSCL programs, parents talked more at home about educational issues and about what happened in their child's school (9 schools). It was also reported that, because of

their participation in courses (e.g., in basic reading), parents were now able to help their children with homework and schoolwork (11 schools). A parent in one school told the coordinator that she had new confidence in helping her child with homework because she had attended a class in mathematics. Other parents benefited from involvement in paired-reading programs; in two schools (both served by the same coordinator), parents were reported to have derived great satisfaction from the paired-reading experience.

Parents were also seen to have become better organized in the preparation of children's lunches as a result of participation in courses (4 schools). In three schools, the presence of parents was seen as a resource for teachers, since parents were on hand to help out with such activities as paired reading and helping in the toy library. Coordinators reported that parents were enjoying their involvement in classroom-based activities (5 schools), were actively seeking classes in which they could be involved (5 schools), and looked for information as to how they could help their children (2 schools).

Coordinators reported on the extent of parent involvement in specified aspects of the HSCL program in schools during the third year (Table 27). As in previous years, "some" parents in a majority of schools had been involved in the HSCL program. For over two-thirds (69%) of schools, coordinators reported that "some" parents had visited the school more often than before and this was also true of

Table 27

**Percentages of Schools for Which Coordinators Reported the Extent  
of Parent Involvement in Specified Aspects of HSCL Programs  
in Schools During the Third Year**

Parents . . .	All parents	Most parents	Some parents	No parents
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
visited the school more often than before	0 (0)	29 (21)	69 (50)	1 (1)
became more involved in children's schoolwork	1 (1)	18 (13)	80 (57)	0 (0)
learned to use new parenting skills	0 (0)	0 (0)	97 (69)	3 (2)
learned skills to cope with personal difficulties	0 (0)	0 (0)	97 (69)	3 (2)
learned to use new home management skills	0 (0)	0 (0)	91 (62)	9 (6)

“most” parents in 29% of schools. There was only one school in which this was not the case.

Coordinators in all schools reported that parents had become more involved in their children's schoolwork. This was true of “some” parents in a majority (80%) of schools and of “most” parents in 18% of schools, while, in one school, the coordinator reported that it was true of “all” parents.

For almost all (97%) schools, coordinators reported that “some” parents had learned to use new parenting skills and skills to cope with personal difficulties. There were only two schools in which “no parents” had learned these skills. For a slightly smaller proportion (91%) of schools, “some” parents were reported to have learned to use new home management skills.

Coordinators in five schools reported that since the introduction of the HSCL scheme, schools were viewed as a focal point or a meeting place for parents. They remarked that parents had a more positive, open, and friendly attitude towards schools (4 schools), had a greater willingness and interest in helping the schools (3 schools), and a greater understanding of the needs of the schools (2 schools). Coordinators in 18 schools believed that the schools were perceived by both parents and members of the community as an open and friendly center where people were welcome to attend courses, drop in for information on courses and facilities, or drop in for a cup of tea.

#### Teachers’ Descriptions of Effects on Parents

Teachers suggested that HSCL activities had provided parents with a structure and a focus to their lives. Activities had stretched parents a little and had given them a new sense of purpose. By attending courses parents were seen to gain in confidence and self-esteem as they met other parents, shared ideas, and educated themselves.

Some teachers worried that many of the courses provided under the auspices of HSCL programs existed merely as a social outlet for parents and that children



would not benefit from the activity. These teachers would have preferred to see parents taking courses that would educate them towards providing a better home environment for their children (e.g., parenting courses, home management courses) or towards helping children with homework/ schoolwork (e.g., courses in basic math, English, or Irish). Other teachers, however, saw the self-development of parents as valuable as it would ultimately benefit children. One teacher described how a number of parents had been transformed through their involvement in a folk group in the school and how these parents were now ready to become involved “educationally.”

Some teachers perceived that parents gained confidence as a result of the training they received to assist the teacher in the classroom. Through this training they gained a greater understanding of what children do in school and what they could do to help their children. Teachers felt that parents' sense of competence was also enhanced when they were trained in the use of computers. Having learned a new skill themselves, they then passed it on to children. In a similar vein, parents who had been involved in a cookery club in one school provided cookery classes to sixth grade pupils.

Enhanced self-confidence among parents is evident from teachers' perceptions that parents came into the school more often than before and approached teachers more freely. Parents were more willing to offer their opinions on practices within the class if they were involved in the classroom. While many teachers might view this development negatively and as interference, others see the value of feedback from

parents. Other evidence of an increase in parent confidence was to be found in one school where parents organized themselves into groups, no longer relying on others to do things for them. One such group got sponsorship from local stores, set up a toy library in the school, and ran it very successfully.

Teachers suggested that, as a result of the activities for parents introduced through the HSCL scheme, parents no longer saw the school as threatening. One teacher learned through feedback from the coordinator that parents felt less intimidated by the school building than before. Parents saw the school as their own as well as their children's and this was particularly evident in schools where there was a parents' room.

Apart from the benefits to parents of greater involvement in the school, teachers also described the benefits to parents of having a coordinator available. They suggested that the coordinator was a person within the school with whom parents could identify, discuss problems, and get help. The coordinator was seen as a person within the school who was dedicated to parents and thus, was easier to approach than other members of school staff. Even in schools which had always had an open-door policy, the presence of the coordinator improved parent contacts as there was now a definite person in the school to implement and encourage that policy. Teachers' perceptions of the effects of the HSCL scheme on parents were, for the most part, confined to those parents who were involved in some form of HSCL activity.

### Types of Parents Involved as Perceived by Teachers

Teachers in the six selected schools were asked to describe the type of parents which they thought were most likely to become involved in the HSCL scheme. Over two-thirds (n=66) stated that parents involved in HSCL activities were the ones who least needed it (Table 28). They were considered to be parents who were already interested in their children's education, who had high aspirations for their children, who were highly motivated and enthusiastic, and had fewer problems.

Involved parents were also quite frequently described by teachers (n=23) as leaders, extrovert, confident, assertive, articulate, and outgoing. Teachers described the "easy to reach" parent as one who would be involved in something else if not in the HSCL scheme or as one who was always interested in getting involved but who previously did not know how to go about it. Other types of involved parent described by teachers included those who had no work commitments or whose children were all in school, parents who used the HSCL scheme as a social outlet, and younger parents or parents whose first child was in school.

Several teachers (n=28) thought that a small core group of parents were involved in HSCL activities all the time. Some teachers viewed this group positively and thought it might encourage other parents to get involved. Already there was some sign of this and some "less interested" parents, though few in number, got involved through the core group. Other teachers were less positive about a core group of parents. In one school, teachers felt that the involved parents constituted an "elitist"

Table 28

**Teachers' Perceptions of the Type of Parents Most Likely  
to Become Involved in the HSCL Scheme**

Type of Parent	Number of teachers (n: 96)
<b>Involved parents</b>	
Parents who needed it least	66
Same parents all the time	28
Extrovert	23
Different kinds of parents	17
"Easy to reach" parents	17
Parents who were "free to be involved"	13
Parents who needed a social outlet	10
Younger parents/first time parents	5
Mothers/women	4
<b>Non-involved parents</b>	
Parents who need it most	34

group that would discourage less confident parents from coming along to HSCL activities. Coordinators were generally aware of this danger and monitored it carefully. The coordinator was also seen to have a role in targeting other parents. A number of teachers stated that, through the encouragement of the coordinator, parents from troubled situations had become involved in HSCL activities.

In describing the parents who were not involved in the HSCL scheme, teachers stated that they were the parents who would need it most, i.e., parents with social or economic problems, illiterate parents, parents of troublesome children, or of children with behavior problems or who were continually absent, poorer parents, and parents who felt inadequate and lacked confidence in themselves. This emphasis is consistent with teachers' suggestion that one of the weaknesses of the HSCL scheme is its failure to target or reach the most needy cases. When teachers were asked to describe the weaknesses of the HSCL scheme almost half of them (47 of 96) referred to the fact that HSCL programs had primarily encouraged parents who already had some interest in becoming involved in the school and that it was the same parents who were involved in everything. The more difficult home situations, the more deprived and needy cases, the homes of weaker, low ability, disturbed, or maladjusted pupils were not being targeted or, if they were, they were not being reached.

Activities suggested by teachers to address this situation included more visits to the homes of such parents and support and counseling services for parents. Teachers (n=9) also pointed to the need to develop activities that would encourage less interested and apathetic parents to become involved. One suggestion was that parents who were already involved in activities in the school would work to encourage other parents to become involved in such activities.

## Conclusion

The availability of the coordinator as a resource to liaise with parents and the community outside the school was perceived as a major advantage of the HSCL scheme. In most schools, increased contact occurred between parents and teachers and there tended to be less conflict and greater cooperation and consultation on school issues. In more than half the schools, changes were made in school organization to accommodate and facilitate parent activities and the HSCL program was discussed at staff meetings in many schools. In four out of five schools, the school was perceived to have a higher profile in the community and, in some schools, contact with community agencies had increased.

At least some teachers in most schools were perceived by coordinators to have become more positive towards parental involvement in schools, to have an increased understanding of the difficulties parents faced, and a greater appreciation of parents' talents and abilities. Teachers found that parents had become easier to contact and problems easier to deal with.

There was great variance among teachers in their attitudes to parent involvement in the classroom and the form such involvement should take. In general, they agreed that the role of parents, particularly in the classroom, needed to be well thought-out and structured, and developed with input from teachers.

Coordinators attributed most of the effects on parents' personal development to parent participation in courses. Teachers, on the other hand, concentrated mostly

on effects as they related to parent involvement in classroom-based activities or to teachers' general contacts with parents. Coordinators were more aware than teachers of the effects of HSCL programs on parents' behavior at home. They could describe improved parenting, home-management, and coping skills resulting from parent participation in courses provided to develop such skills.

Effects of HSCL programs on parent involvement in their children's education were most evident to teachers when parents were trained for involvement in classroom-based activities. Similarly, coordinators perceived the effects on parent involvement in children's education to be most apparent when parents participated in courses designed to help them to help their children (e.g., in basic reading and in paired-reading programs). Courses which teachers saw as being of most potential benefit to children were those with which coordinators also associated the most positive and specific effects.

While the effects described on parents were of a very positive nature, it must be noted that they were generally confined to parents who were involved in program activities and whom teachers often regarded as being least in need of the HSCL scheme. Initiatives were perceived to be necessary to encourage the involvement of all parents, particularly those whose needs seemed greatest.

Both coordinators and teachers reported that the HSCL scheme had some effects on children, mostly in terms of children developing a more positive attitude towards school and teachers, towards themselves, and towards their parents.

Coordinators also reported some general improvements in behavior while teachers pointed to the long-term educational benefits for children of the development of parents' interest in education through HSCL activities. Teachers also saw some immediate benefits to children of parent involvement in paired-reading programs and parent involvement in classrooms.



## CHAPTER IX

### MOTHERS' INTERVIEW

When the HSCL programs had been running in schools for a period of two years, an interview was conducted to obtain systematic data from mothers that might throw more light on the question of involvement and its correlates. At the time, there was an insufficient number of fathers involved in the scheme to include them. Despite the fact that HSCL programs were open to both parents it was more often mothers rather than fathers who became involved. This is a feature of programs worldwide (see Lareau, 1989; Van Leer Foundation, 1992). Further, given the potential influence of mothers on their children's educational development, it was reasonable that they should be targeted for involvement in HSCL programs, at least during the initial years.

#### Sample Selection

A sample of mothers of pupils in the six elementary schools selected for detailed study was interviewed at the end of the second year of the scheme. Only mothers that had a child in junior infants, first, third, or fifth grade in the six schools (i.e., those children for whom achievement data had been obtained) were eligible for selection.

The population of mothers was further stratified in terms of their involvement in HSCL programs in the schools. In this way it was hoped to examine characteristics of uninvolved mothers that might be of use for the further development of the scheme, specifically in relation to involving mothers who had not been involved.

Mothers were identified as “involved” in HSCL programs on the basis of coordinators' reports of their consistent involvement in one or more activities. Coordinators' were asked to designate as “involved” only those mothers who had been actively involved in at least one of the following aspects of the HSCL program in the school (a) courses for parents (e.g., cookery: home-management; assertiveness; computer skills; literacy); (b) committees involving parents (e.g., Local Committee; Parent Education Group); (c) groups for parents (e.g., women's action group; bereavement group; gardening club); (d) helping in school (e.g. toy library, crèche, playgroup, or homework club); (e) helping groups of pupils in the classroom or outside the classroom (e.g., computer activities); and (f) paired reading or reading together schemes.

Obviously, there was some variation in the extent of mothers' involvement in HSCL programs. Some mothers had chosen to limit their participation to attendance at a course or activity while others (e.g., those who helped with the crèche or were members of local committees) had taken an active role in organizing aspects of the program at school level. No attempt was made to distinguish between these levels of involvement for sampling purposes. However, a minimum level of involvement as

outlined above was required. Mothers who simply attended a drop-in center were categorized as “uninvolved” rather than “involved.” The reasons for this decision were: (a) coordinators could not have designated all of these mothers accurately as they had no record of their involvement; (b) the nature of such involvement was difficult to determine since it occurred on an ad-hoc basis and did not have a focus other than to allow parents the opportunity, albeit important, to meet informally.

A total of 1,408 pupils in the relevant grades was listed. It was decided to select one-half of all pupils (i.e., every second pupil on the list) whose mothers were involved and one-quarter (i.e., every fourth pupil) of those whose mothers were not involved. An exception was made in the case of one school (a junior school) for which, because of very high pupil numbers, it was decided to sample pupils at half the standard rate, i.e., one-quarter (every fourth pupil) of involved mothers and one-eighth (every eighth pupil) of those uninvolved. If a mother had a child at more than one of these grade levels, one child at a particular grade level was selected as the reference child for the interview. This was done at random.

A total of 389 mothers were selected for interview (149 involved, 240 uninvolved). Mothers were contacted and interviewed at home. Thirty-three of the original 389 mothers selected could not be contacted for various reasons (e.g., resident but never at home, temporarily absent due to illness or vacation, or moved away permanently). One mother refused to be interviewed. The total number of completed

interviews was 355. Of these, 43 were excluded from analyses as they contained responses which led to ambiguity about mothers' involvement in the program.

Preliminary analyses of interview data did not reveal great differences between the "involved" and "uninvolved" groups. On closer examination, however, it became clear that the group of uninvolved mothers was quite heterogeneous. Some mothers, while not involved in HSCL programs, were nonetheless very involved in their children's education. Others did not appear to be deeply involved in their children's education, usually because of more pressing problems in the home.

Coordinators felt that they could distinguish between these two types of "uninvolved" mothers and so were asked to indicate for each mother whether they felt her family was or was not in need of the kind of assistance provided by HSCL programs and by other services. To ensure, as far as possible, that the five coordinators used the same criteria for such designation, the evaluation manager was present with them while they completed the task and discussed their reasons for such designation.

The two uninvolved groups that were identified in this way are described as "uninvolved - okay" (UOK) and "uninvolved - needs help" (UNH). The total number of valid interviews was 340, which included 121 involved (I), 138 UOK, and 81 UNH mothers. (Fifteen records could not be included in analyses due to ambiguity of responses.)

### Rationale and Issues Addressed

The interview instrument was made up of structured questions and consisted of three sections. All mothers completed two sections of the interview that included questions about home background factors (including parents' aspirations, achievement training, independence training, educational attitudes and practices); school-home practices; personality traits; attitudes and knowledge related to education in general, to their child's schooling, and to the HSCL scheme; and family demographics (see Table 29 for categories and sources of items).

A further section of the interview was administered only to involved mothers. Questions in the section sought information on a number of specific issues related to the HSCL scheme to augment information from other sources (i.e., school staff, coordinators, and pupils). The issues related to: levels and patterns of participation among mothers involved in HSCL school programs; input from mothers in determining HSCL courses; mothers' role in involving other mothers in HSCL programs; and mothers' perceptions of people closely involved in HSCL activities (Table 29). The format of questions included dichotomous (yes, no), scaled (e.g., 5-point scale), and open ended questions which were subsequently coded (e.g., occupation, attitudes to involved parents).

Table 29

## Mothers' Interview: Issues, Related Item Numbers, and Sources of Items

Sections 1 and 3 (All Mothers)			
Issue	Criterion	Related Items	Sources
Home background factors	Aspirations for education of child	62a, 62b, 63, 66a, 66b	Greaney & Hegarty, 1987
		64a, 64b, 65a, 65b	Kellaghan, Madaus, & Airasian, 1980
Achievement training	(i) Academic	11(i), 11(ii), 11(iii), 12, 13, 15, 57a, 57b	Greaney & Hegarty, 1987
	(ii) Nonacademic	56a, 56b	Greaney & Hegarty, 1987
	(iii) Extent to which parents are models of achievement	22a, 22b, 56b	Greaney & Hegarty, 1987
Independence training		61a-61j	Greaney & Hegarty, 1987
Level of structure in child's activities		60	Marjoribanks, 1979

Table 29—Continued

Sections 1 and 3 (All Mothers)			
Issue	Criterion	Related Items	Sources
	Nurturing/educational interactions with child		
	(i) Reading to child	19d, 20	Greaney & Hegarty, 1987
	(ii) Listening to child read	19c, 21	Greaney & Hegarty, 1987
	(iii) Monitoring, discussion of child's reading/television viewing	58a, 58b, 59a, 59b	Greaney & Hegarty, 1987
	(iv) Monitoring, discussion of things child does at school	19a, 19b	Dave, 1963; Wolf, 1964; Lareau, 1987; Henderson, 1987
Interest in academic achievement			
	(i) Knowledge of practices in child's class	10	Kellaghan et al., 1980
		14	Dave, 1963; Wolf, 1964; Lareau, 1987; Henderson, 1987
		16a	Greaney & Hegarty, 1987 (format only)

Table 29—Continued

Sections 1 and 3 (All Mothers)			
Issue	Criterion	Related Items	Sources
School-home practices	(ii) Monitoring of child's schoolwork	16b, 17a, 17b, 17c, 18a, 18b, 51, 52	Greaney & Hegarty, 1987
		19a, 19b	Dave, 1963; Wolf, 1964; Lareau, 1987; Henderson, 1987
		49, 51, 52	Kellaghan et al., 1980
	(iii) Perception of child's liking of school and confidence at school	47, 48	Kellaghan et al., 1980
	Communication between parents and teachers		
	(i) Visits to class teacher	7a, 7b(ii), 7b(iii), 8, 9	Kellaghan et al., 1980
		7b(i), 7b(iv), 7b(v)	Coordinator interviews, 1991



Table 29—Continued

Sections 1 and 3 (All Mothers)			
Issue	Criterion	Related Items	Sources
Parents' personality traits	(ii) School reports (written)	10	Kellaghan et al., 1980
	(iii) Homework notebooks	16a, 16b	Dave, 1963; Wolf, 1964; Lareau, 1987; Henderson, 1987; (format: Greaney & Hegarty, 1987)
	(iv) Home visits	28a, 28b	Knowledge of HSCL
	Interaction about child(ren) and school	2a, 2b	Lareau, 1987; Dave, 1963; Wolf, 1964
	Locus of control	55c	Parent interviews, 1991
		55d	McGrew & Gilman, 1985
		69a, 69d	Hess & Shipman, 1965
		69c	Kellaghan et al., 1980
	Individualistic/collective orientation	69e, 69f, 69g	Lareau, 1987

Table 29—Continued

Sections 1 and 3 (All Mothers)			
Issue	Criterion	Related Items	Sources
Parents' attitudes	Achievement motivation	67, 69b	Kellaghan et al., 1980
		69a	Hess & Shipman, 1965
	Attributions of child's success/further success at school	50, 53	Hess, Chih-Mei, & McDevitt, 1987
	General attitudes to school and to teachers	5g, 5h, 5i	Hess & Shipman, 1965
	Attitudes to HSCL concepts	1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 27, 29a, 29b	Attitudes to HSCL (format Kellaghan et al., 1980)
	Level of satisfaction with own education	67, 68	Kellaghan et al., 1980
	Perceived role in child's education	54	Lareau, 1987; Hess & Shipman, 1965
		55a, 55b, 55c, 55d, 55e	Parent interview, 1991

Table 29—Continued

Sections 1 and 3 (All Mothers)			
Issue	Criterion	Related Items	Sources
Operation of HSCL in schools	Perceived collaboration between parents and teachers	5a, 5b, 5c, 5e, 5f  5d  5g, 5j	Parent interview, 1991  Kellaghan et al., 1980  McGrew & Gilman, 1985
	Extent of mother's knowledge about HSCL	4a, 4b, 4c, 4d, 4e, 4f  23a, 26  29a, 29b	Lareau, 1987  Knowledge of HSCL  Attitudes to HSCL
	Networking of HSCL among parents	23b, 24a, 24b, 24c	Meeting other parents-HSCL
	Attitude to involved parents	25	Attitudes to HSCL

Table 29—Continued

Sections 1 and 3 (All Mothers)			
Issue	Criterion	Related Items	Sources
Family demographics	Household composition	3	Kellaghan et al., 1980
		6	Majoribanks, 1987
	Employment status (respondent and partner)	70a, 70b, 71a, 71b	Lareau, 1987; Douglas, 1964
	Level of parental education	72, 73	Greaney & Hegarty, 1987

Table 29—Continued

Section 2 (Involved Mothers Only)			
Issue	Criterion	Related Items	Sources
Participation and impact of HSCL activities	Reason(s) for becoming involved	31(a-l)	HSCL (participation)
		31(a, b, c, i, j, k, l)	(Format: Greaney & Hegarty, 1987)
	Whether involved in school-based activities	30	HSCL (participation)
	Nature of involvement	32, 33	HSCL (participation)
	Perceived benefits of involvement	34a-h	Impact of HSCL involvement
	Attendance at classes/courses	35	HSCL (participation)
	(i) Whether mother attended classes/courses		
	(ii) Nature of classes attended	36	HSCL (participation)
	(iii) Frequency of attendance and reasons for nonattendance	37, 38	HSCL (participation)

Table 29—Continued

Section 2 (Involved Mothers Only)			
Issue	Criterion	Related Items	Sources
	(iv) Perceived benefits of involvement	39a, 39b, 39c, 39g 39d, 39e, 39f, 39h	Greaney & Hegarty, 1987 HSCL (impact)
	(v) Parental input into decisions about classes	40a, 40b	HSCL (participation)
	Classroom involvement		
	(i) Whether involved in classroom-based activities	41a	HSCL (participation)
	(ii) Perceived benefits of involvement	41b (a-g)	HSCL (impact)
	(iii) Perceived problems	41b (c) 42a, 42b	Greaney & Hegarty, 1987 HSCL (impact)

Table 29—Continued

Section 2 (Involved Mothers Only)			
Issue	Criterion	Related Items	Sources
	Parent leadership		
	(i) Whether mother was a parent leader	43	HSCL (participation)
	(ii) Reason for becoming a leader	44	HSCL (participation)
	(iii) Perceived benefits of involvement	46a, 46b, 46c, 46d	HSCL (impact)
	(iv) Perceived problems	46a, 46b	HSCL (impact)

### Home Background Factors

Questions were included about home background because of the well-established relationship between such factors and children's scholastic performance (Kellaghan & Macnamara, 1972; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993; Kellaghan, 1994). The term "home background" is vague and encompasses many factors such as family size, family income (more commonly referred to as SES variables) as well as measures of relationships and practices within the home (home process variables) as described in Chapter II.

Specific variables addressed in the interview and the sources of the items include: educational aspirations (Greaney & Hegarty, 1987; Kellaghan, Madaus, & Airasian, 1980); achievement training, including academic and non-academic aspects, and parent modeling of good behaviors (Greaney & Hegarty, 1987); independence training (Greaney & Hegarty, 1987); structuring of child's leisure activities (Marjoribanks, 1979); nurturing educational interactions (i.e., reading to child, listening to reading, monitoring and discussion of reading and television viewing (all adopted from Greaney & Hegarty, 1987) and monitoring and discussion of school work (Davé, 1963; Wolf, 1964; Lareau, 1987; Henderson, 1987).

### School-Home Practices

In recognition of the influence that the home and the school exercise on the development of children, there has been increasing emphasis in recent years on the



relationship between the two institutions (Lombana, 1983). Schools, for their part, have become more aware of the integral role of parents in their children's learning and have made attempts to increase parents' involvement (Swap, 1990; Krasnow, 1990; Craft, Raynor, & Cohen, 1980).

Many countries, to varying degrees, have accorded increasing prominence in law to the role of parents in schools (Macbeth, 1989). The recent White Paper on education in Ireland (Ireland, 1995) in which the government commits itself "to promoting the active participation of parents at every level of the education process" (p. 140) is one example. The Education Reform Act of 1988 for England and Wales was similarly concerned with parents' roles, particularly in relation to representation on governing bodies (Macbeth, 1989). In Denmark and the Netherlands, government provides finance for the establishment of independent schools by groups of parents (Macbeth & Ravn, 1994).

Whatever the status and nature of parents' roles in schools, an important element of good home-school relationships would appear to be communication (Lombana, 1983). Because of this, many initiatives designed to improve relations between the two institutions emphasize the improvement of contacts and communications between parents and schools (Jowett, Baginsky, & MacNeil, 1991; Lombana, 1983; Swap, 1990; Krasnow, 1990).

This interview collected information (using items from listed sources) about various forms of school-home communications, including: parent visits to teachers,

school reports sent to homes (Kellaghan et al, 1980); the use of homework notebooks (Davé, 1963; Wolf, 1964; Lareau, 1987; Henderson, 1987), home visits, and information about school (Lareau, 1987).

### Parents' Personality Traits and Parents' Attitudes

Parents' personality traits and parents' attitudes are undoubtedly important in mediating the home environment and, as such, are central to the development in children of motivations and aspirations that influence their success in life (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993). The measures included in these sections of the interview are focused in particular on traits and attitudes that have been found to be closely related to children's educational performance (Kellaghan, Madaus, & Airasian, 1980; Hess, Chih-Mei, & McDevitt, 1987; and Lareau, 1987).

The parents' personality traits to be examined were adapted from previous studies and included: locus of control (McGrew & Gilman, 1985; Hess & Shipman, 1965; and Kellaghan, Madaus, & Airasian, 1980); individualistic/ collective orientation (Lareau, 1987); achievement motivation (Hess & Shipman, 1965; Kellaghan, Madaus, & Airasian, 1980); and attributions of child's success at school (Hess, Chih-Mei, & McDevitt, 1987).

Among the attitudinal variables included in the study (and the sources for each) are: attitudes to school and to teachers (Hess & Shipman, 1965); levels of satisfaction with own education (Kellaghan, Madaus, & Airasian, 1980); perceived role in child's

education (Lareau, 1987; Hess & Shipman, 1965); perceived collaboration between parents and teachers (Kellaghan, Madaus, & Airasian, 1980; McGrew & Gilman, 1985); and attitudes to the HSCL scheme in particular.

### Mothers' Awareness of the HSCL Program

All mothers were also asked specific questions about their levels of awareness of the HSCL program in their child's school, how they found out about the program, and their attitudes to those parents that were involved in HSCL activities.

### Demographic Information

Mothers were also asked questions about household composition (also adapted from listed sources), including items about family size and composition (Marjoribanks, 1979; Kellaghan, Madaus, & Airasian, 1980), their own (and, in two-adult households, their partner's) employment status (Lareau, 1987; Douglas, 1964), and their own (and their partner's) educational levels (Greaney & Hegarty, 1987).

### Mothers' Involvement in HSCL Programs

Involved mothers, as mentioned earlier, also completed Section 2 of the interview that covered issues related to their involvement in the HSCL program in their child's school. Specific issues about which questions were asked were: reasons for becoming involved; nature of involvement (e.g., school-based activities, committee

level involvement), and their opinions about the benefits to them of their involvement (adapted from Greaney & Hegarty, 1987). To determine levels and patterns of participation in the HSCL programs in the six schools, questions about attendance at classes/courses, classroom involvement, and parent leadership roles in the schools were also included.

### Involved Mothers

This section contains analyses relating to mothers' involvement in the HSCL programs in the six selected schools. Responses were available from 112 mothers for the analyses reported here.

#### Levels and Patterns of Involvement Among Mothers

Mothers were asked to indicate their reasons for getting involved in the HSCL program in their child's school. They were presented with ten possible reasons and asked to say whether or not each applied. The three reasons most frequently endorsed for getting involved were: to be more involved in their children's education, to get out of the home, and to be better able to help their child with schoolwork (Table 30). It is noteworthy that two of the reasons relate to enhancing the mother's involvement in her child's education. The main reason given for inconsistent attendance at courses was because of family responsibilities.

Table 30

**Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Giving Varying Reasons  
for Getting Involved in Activities at Child's School**

<b>Reason for getting involved in activities at child's school</b>	<b>No. of mothers (n: 112)</b>	<b>%</b>
To be more involved in children's education	65	58
To get out of the home	57	51
To be better able to help child with schoolwork	54	48
To meet other parents	46	41
To help out at the school	40	36
To improve my own education	39	35
To have something to look forward to for myself	37	33
To learn useful skills for home	36	32
To learn more about a pastime	25	22
To help get a job/promotion in job	5	5
To make my life easier	2	2

Mothers were asked about their involvement in four main areas: (1) school-based activities, (2) courses or classes for parents, (3) helping in the classroom, and (4) taking a leading role in parent activities. Mothers were most frequently involved in attending courses for parents (Table 31). Almost four-fifths stated that they had

attended such a course. By contrast, only 4% stated that they had taken a leading role in parent activities. A considerable percentage of involved mothers (37%) had helped the teacher in the classroom.

Whether mothers were involved in one, two, or three activities, the emphasis on participation in courses was very strong. For instance, 74% of mothers who were involved in only one activity stated that they were involved in courses, while the next most frequent area of involvement was school-based activities (16%) (Table 32).

When mothers were involved in two or three activities, courses were almost always included in the combinations. The most frequent combination for two activities consisted of courses and school-based activities (Table 33). The most frequent combination of three activities consisted of school-based activities, courses, and helping in the classroom (Table 34).

Table 31

Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Involved in Various HSCL Activities

Type of activity	Number of mothers (n: 112)	%
Courses	89	79
School-based activities	58	52
Classroom activities	41	37
Leading role	4	4

Table 32

**Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Involved in One Activity  
by Type of Activity**

Type of activity	Number of mothers (n: 55)	%
Courses	41	75
School-based activities	9	16
Classroom activities	5	9
Leading role	0	0

Table 33

**Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Involved in Two Activities  
by Type of Activity**

Type of activity	Number of mothers (n: 37)	%
School-based activities/courses	19	51
School-based activities/help in classroom	9	24
Courses/help in classroom	8	22
Courses/leading role	1	3

Table 34

**Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Involved in Three Activities  
by Type of Activity**

Type of activity	Number of mothers (n: 19)	%
School-based activities/courses/help in classroom	18	95
School-based activities/courses/leading role	1	5

**Involvement in School-Based Activities**

Fifty-two per cent of the sample had taken part in school-based (as opposed to classroom-based) activities. The majority of these (65%) had been involved in only one such activity (Table 35).

Table 35

**Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Involved in One, Two, or Three  
School-Based Activities**

Number of school-based activities	Number of mothers (n: 58)	%
One	38	65
Two	16	28
Three	4	7



To examine the patterns of involvement, the activities described by mothers were categorized into five types: (1) curriculum enrichment (e.g., giving drama, dancing, or pottery classes, involvement in TEAM theater, helping with school concert, school tour, or Christmas party); (2) curricular (e.g., being a paired-reading tutor, helping with library, supervising homework); (3) social (e.g., involvement in playgroup committee, organizing crèche, collecting money for swimming/aerobics classes, organizing parent-staff lunch); (4) educational (e.g., facilitating at a parenting program/personal development course); and (5) other (e.g., running blazer rental scheme, book shop, or school shop, or decorating school, making sandwiches for lunches, helping with school garden, covering school books). The highest frequency of participation was in curriculum enrichment activities, followed by curricular activities (Table 36).

This trend was consistent whether mothers participated in one, two, or three school-based activities. Among mothers who reported being involved in just one activity, curriculum enrichment activities featured twice as often as the next most popular type, curricular activities, which together accounted for 85% of these mothers (Table 37).

Table 36

Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Who Took Part in Different Types of School-Based Activities\*

Type of school-based activity	Number of mothers (n: 58)	%
Curriculum enrichment	38	66
Curricular	23	40
Social	6	10
Educational	2	3
Other	1	2

\* Some mothers took part in more than one type of school-based activity

Table 37

Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Involved in Only One School-Based Activity Who Took Part in Different Types of Activity

Activity	Number of mothers (n: 38)	%
Curriculum enrichment	22	58
Curricular	11	29
Social	2	5
Educational	2	5
Other	1	3

For mothers who reported being involved in two activities, the curriculum enrichment or curricular type appeared in every combination (Table 38). Indeed, half of the two-activity group combined a curriculum enrichment and a curricular type of activity. A further one-fifth (3 of 16) took part in two curriculum enrichment activities. Both curriculum enrichment and curricular-type activities appeared in all (n=4) three-activity combinations.

Table 38

Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Involved in Two School-Based Activities Who Took Part in Two Types of Activity

Activity-type combination	Number of mothers (n: 16)	%
Curriculum enrichment/curricular	8	50
Curriculum enrichment/curriculum enrichment	3	19
Curriculum enrichment/social	3	19
Curriculum enrichment/educational	1	6
Curriculum enrichment/other	1	6

Mothers who were involved in school-based activities were asked to indicate if they had experienced any of seven possible benefits (e.g., getting to know other parents, feeling more comfortable talking to teachers). Almost all said that each of the

benefits had applied (Table 39). Some also described additional benefits including improved self confidence (7%) and greater understanding of their child (5%).

Table 39

Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Who Endorsed Each of Seven Expected Benefits of Involvement in School-Based Activities

Benefit	Number of mothers (n: 58)	%
Got to know other parents	56	97
Look forward to going to school	55	95
Feel more comfortable talking to teachers	54	93
Talked to other parents about children and school	54	93
Feel more comfortable going to school without being invited	53	92
Got to know my child's teacher better	52	90
Know more about things happening in school	52	90

### Involvement in Courses

As we saw, 79% of mothers (89 of 112) went to courses at their child's school which were provided under the HSCL program. Of these, 84% had been asked what courses they would like to go to, while only 16% had not been asked. The majority of mothers (91%) who had been asked were asked by the HSCL coordinator. Those who

had not been asked either saw a notice about courses at the school or a leaflet had been sent home. In terms of attendance at courses, 76% of mothers had gone to all or almost all of the sessions provided. While this percentage represents the majority of mothers, it still means that 24% were inconsistent attenders (19% had gone to about half the sessions and 5% had gone to less than half or to only one or two of the sessions). The main reason given for non-attendance at courses was family duties (e.g., work, family illness, or a child at home) (Table 40).

Table 40  
Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Giving Varying Reasons  
for Nonattendance at Courses

Reason for nonattendance	Number of mothers (n: 89)	%
Family duties	45	51
Did not enjoy meetings	4	5
Course/class not suitable	2	2
Bad weather	1	1
Other	11	12
No reason given	26	29

When level of participation is examined in terms of the number of courses attended by mothers, two-thirds are found to have been involved in just one course (Table 41).

Table 41

Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Attending One, Two, and Three Courses

Number of courses	Number of mothers (n: 89)	%
One	59	66
Two	22	25
Three	8	9

Mothers were asked to describe the courses that they had attended. To examine patterns of involvement, the courses were categorized into four main types: (1) parenting courses, (2) self-development courses, (3) home management courses, and (4) courses relating to involvement in child's education. Of the 89 mothers who attended, the majority (70%) attended self-development courses (including personal development, leisure, and educational courses). Only 29% attended parenting courses while 24% attended home management courses. Very few attended courses relating to children's education (Table 42). The emphasis on self-development courses is even more evident in the figures for mothers who attended only one type of course. More than three times as many mothers attended this type of course as the next most

Table 42

Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Attending Different Types of Courses  
(Regardless of the Number of Courses Taken)

Type of course	Number of mothers (n: 89)	%
Self-development	62	70
Parenting	26	29
Home management	21	24
Involvement in child's education	8	9

frequently attended course (parenting) (Table 43). When mothers attended two or three courses, the course combinations almost always included one in self-development. The type of two-course combination most frequently described by mothers was that of a self-development course and a home management course (Table 44). The most common three-course combination included a parenting course, a self-development course, and a home management course (Table 45).

Mothers who participated in courses were asked to indicate if they had experienced any of seven expected benefits. The benefits most frequently endorsed by mothers were that the mother had got to know other parents, that parents helped and supported each other, that the mother had gained in confidence and had improved her own education (Table 46). An additional benefit mentioned by some mothers was that they enjoyed the social aspect of courses (7%). A few mothers, rather than describe an additional benefit, stated that the course had not been suitable (3%).

Table 43

Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Attending Only One Course,  
by Type of Course

Type of course	Number of mothers (n: 59)	%
Self-development	39	66
Parenting	12	20
Home management	6	10
Involvement in child's education	2	5

Table 44

Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Attending Two Courses by Type of Course

Type of two-course combination	Number of mothers (n: 21)	%
Self-development/home management	6	29
Self-development/parenting	5	24
Self-development/self-development	4	19
Parenting/home management	2	9
Home management/involvement in child's education	2	9
Parenting/parenting	1	5
Involvement in children's education/involvement in children's education	1	5



**Table 45**  
**Numbers of Mothers Attending Three Courses by Type of Course**

Type of three-course combination	Number of mothers (n: 8)
Parenting/self-development/home management	4
Self-development/home management/involvement in child's education	2
Parenting/self-development/self-development	1
Parenting/self-development/involvement in child's education	1

**Table 46**  
**Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Who Endorsed Each of Seven Expected Benefits of Involvement in Courses**

Benefit	Number of mothers (n: 89)	%
Got to know other parents	86	97
Parents helped and supported each other	80	90
Gained more confidence in myself	78	88
Improved my own education	74	83
Learned to help my own child with schoolwork	61	69
Learned more about a hobby I enjoy	50	56
Learned useful skills for home	46	51

### Involvement in the Classroom

The 36% of involved mothers who had helped the teacher in the classroom were asked to indicate if they had experienced any of six expected benefits of this type of involvement. The vast majority of mothers endorsed each of the benefits (Table 47). Practically all mothers felt that they had learned more about what the teacher's job is like, about what being in a classroom is like for a child, and about problems the teacher might have in the classroom. They also found it easier to ask the teacher questions and became more confident about helping their own child. It is noteworthy that a higher percentage of mothers who had helped in the classroom (88%) learned new ways to help their child with homework than did mothers who had attended courses (69%).

### Leadership Role in Parent Activities

Only four parents of the involved sample had taken a leading role in parent activities. All endorsed three expected benefits of having a leading role: they had gained confidence in their ability to help other people, and had learned how to organize a group and how to take control of a situation. When asked why they had taken on a leading role, three of the mothers endorsed each of the following reasons: to use new skills that they had learned, to help other parents to use new skills, and because they had been asked to take on the role. While there may have been some ambiguity about mothers' perceptions of what constituted a leading role, evidence

Table 47

**Numbers and Percentages of Mothers Who Endorsed Each of Six  
Expected Benefits of Parent Involvement in the Classroom**

<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Number of mothers (n: 41)</b>	<b>%</b>
Learned more about what teacher's job is like	40	98
Learned more about what being in a classroom is like for child	40	98
Learned more about problems the teacher might have in the classroom	39	95
Found it easier to ask the teacher questions	39	95
Became more confident about helping child	38	93
Learned ways to help child with schoolwork	36	88

from coordinators' reports indicated that this was an aspect of HSCL programs that developed slowly at first. However, by the third year of the scheme, the number of parents who were taking a leading role had grown considerably with parents taking responsibility for maintaining the Parents' Room and running the crèche (in 66% of schools) and helping in the running of parent courses (in 75% of schools). In about half the schools, parents (usually one or two) acted as presenters or facilitators of parent courses.

### Comparisons of Characteristics of Involved and Uninvolved Mothers

This section contains analyses that compare involved mothers and both groups of uninvolved mothers (as described in the previous section) on demographic characteristics, school-related practices, knowledge of child's progress, aspirations for child, school-related attitudes, and knowledge and attitudes to the HSCL program.

#### Demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristics (i.e., employment status, household composition, and educational level) of mothers interviewed are presented in Tables 48 to 56.

Employment status shows a statistically significant difference between the groups of mothers. The most striking differences serve to distinguish UNH mothers from both the I and UOK groups: almost twice as many UNH mothers came from households in which both parents were unemployed than did either I or UOK mothers and only 1.3% of UNH households had both parents employed, compared with 18.3% and 19% of I and UOK households respectively (Table 48).

There were also significant differences between the groups on household composition variables (Tables 49 to 52). A greater proportion of UNH mothers than UOK and I mothers were in single-parent families. Further, on average, households of UNH mothers had significantly more children than households of involved mothers (4.0 compared with 3.4) and also more children between the ages of 4 and 14 years

than involved households (2.8 compared with 2.4). There are no differences between the groups in the number of children aged over 15 years or from 0-3 years.

Table 48

**Employment Status of Involved and Uninvolved Mothers and Their Partners**

Employment status	I (n: 120) %	UOK (n: 137) %	UNH (n: 78) %	Total (n: 335) %
<b>Two-parent family:</b>				
Both parents unemployed	25.0	29.2	48.7	32.2
Father employed/mother unemployed	31.7	29.2	19.2	27.8
Both parents employed	18.3	19.0	1.3	14.6
Mother employed/father unemployed	5.8	10.9	6.4	8.1
<b>One-parent family:</b>				
Mother unemployed	12.5	10.2	21.8	13.7
Mother employed	6.7	1.5	2.6	3.6

$\chi^2=36.73$ ,  $df=10$ ,  $p<.0001$

Coordinators had suggested that having young children at home was one reason for lack of involvement in the HSCL scheme. While the current finding suggests that the number of young children at home (i.e., aged 0-3 years) is not

singularly a factor in involvement, it is possible that it may be so when combined with other family circumstances, for example, the number of older children to be cared for or the availability of a baby-sitter.

Table 49

## Percentages of One- and Two-Parent Families in Households

	I (n: 121) %	UOK (n: 138) %	UNH (n: 80) %	Total (n: 339) %
Two parents	80	88	76	83
One parent	20	12	24	17

$$\chi^2=5.98, df=2, p=.05$$

Table 50

## Average Number of Children in Households

	I (n: 121)	UOK (n: 138)	UNH (n: 80)	Total	F	df	p	Scheffé (p<.05)
Average no. children	3.4	3.6	4.0	3.6	3.0	2,336	.05	I*UNH
by age range								
0-3 years (n: 97)	1.2	1.2	1.4	1.3	0.7	2,94	.48	
4-14 years (n: 338)	2.4	2.4	2.8	2.5	3.4	2,335	<.05	UOK*UNH I*UNH
14+ years (n: 105)	2.5	2.8	2.5	2.6	0.4	2,102	.70	

Table 51

## Percentages of Mothers With Varying Numbers of Children

	I (n: 121)		UOK (n: 138)		UNH (n: 81)		Total (n: 339)	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
1 child	11.6	(14)	5.1	(7)	2.5	(2)	6.8	(23)
2-4 children	68.6	(83)	70.3	(97)	66.3	(53)	68.7	(233)
More than 4 children	19.3	(24)	24.6	(34)	31.2	(26)	24.5	(83)

$$\chi^2=9.53, df=4, p=.05$$

Table 52

## Percentages of Mothers With Children in Specified Age Groups

	I (n: 121)		UOK (n: 138)		UNH (n: 80)		Total (n: 339)	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
0 - 3 years	9	(31)	11	(37)	9	(29)	29	(97)
4 - 14 years	36	(121)	41	(138)	24	(80)	100	(339)
14+ years	10	(34)	13	(44)	8	(27)	31	(105)

There are no significant differences between the groups of mothers in the level of schooling that they or their partners had attained (Tables 53, 54). The majority of both mothers and partners in the I and UOK groups had obtained some level of post-

primary education (mostly from one to two years post-primary up to the Group or Intermediate Certificate) but this majority was slightly smaller for UNH mothers. Few I or UOK mothers and none of the UNH mothers had obtained their Leaving Certificate or gone on to further education. While slightly more partners had done so in each group, the pattern was similar: almost twice as many partners of I (15.3%) and UOK (17.3%) mothers than partners of UNH (9.5%) mothers had reached Leaving Certificate or further education.

Table 53

## Percentages of Mothers Who Reached Varying Levels of School Attainment

Level of schooling attained	I (n: 120)		UOK (n: 137)		UNH (n: 80)		Total (n: 337)	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
Sixth grade primary	26.4	(32)	31.4	(43)	38.7	(31)	31.5	(106)
1-2 years post-primary	42.1	(51)	36.5	(50)	41.3	(33)	39.8	(134)
Intermediate/Group Certificate	21.5	(26)	23.4	(32)	20.0	(16)	22.0	(74)
Leaving Certificate	6.6	(8)	7.3	(10)	0	(0)	5.3	(18)
Further education	2.5	(3)	1.5	(2)	0	(0)	1.5	(5)

$$\chi^2=10.807, df=8, ns$$



Table 54

## Percentages of Partners Who Reached Varying Levels of School Attainment

	I (n: 98)		UOK (n: 121)		UNH (n: 63)		Total (n: 282)	
Level of schooling attained	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
Sixth grade primary	26.5	(26)	34.7	(42)	39.7	(25)	33.0	(93)
1-2 years post-primary	27.6	(27)	27.3	(33)	23.8	(15)	26.6	(75)
Intermediate/Group Certificate	30.6	(30)	20.7	(25)	27.0	(17)	25.5	(72)
Leaving Certificate	14.3	(14)	14.0	(17)	7.9	(5)	12.8	(36)
Further education	1.0	(1)	3.3	(4)	1.6	(1)	2.1	(6)

$$\chi^2=7.5345, df=8, ns$$

School-Related Practices

All groups of mothers and their partners were equally likely to talk to their child's teacher: all UOK mothers and 97.5% of both I and UNH mothers had done so during the 1991-92 school year. However, involved mothers met their child's teacher significantly more often than either group of uninvolved mothers (average: 3.3 for I mothers versus 3.0 and 2.9 for UOK and UNH on a 4-point rating scale where 1 = once; 2 = twice; 3 = 3 or 4 times; and 4 = 5 times or more;  $F = 4.49$ ,  $df = 2,332$ ,  $p = .01$ ). This finding supports coordinators' reports that, while they are in the school, involved mothers have incidental contacts with teachers that the other groups can not.

Partners of UOK (56%) mothers were more likely to have talked to the child's class teacher than were partners of either I (49%) or UNH (35%) ( $\chi^2=6.78$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Mothers in each of the groups were equally likely to talk to their child and to their partner about the child's school reports (over 90% in each case). The vast majority of partners also talked to their child about reports (84%, 92%, and 89% respectively).

Mothers were asked to describe how they would respond to a report about their child that was better than usual or worse than usual. The groups showed similar patterns in their most frequent responses to both types of report (Table 55). The most frequent response for all groups was to provide a reward following a report that was better than usual and to determine the reason for low performance following a report that was worse than usual.

Table 55

Percentages of Mothers Indicating Reactions to Child's Report  
That Was (a) Better or (b) Worse Than Usual

Mother's response	I (n: 104) %	UOK (n: 130) %	UNH (n: 76) %	Total (n: 310) %
(a) Report better than usual:				
Would provide reward	79.8	76.9	68.4	75.8
Would encourage child	13.5	18.5	7.9	14.2
(b) Report worse than usual				
Determine reason for low performance	55.8	49.6	40.8	49.5
Request more care in future	27.9	38.8	28.9	32.7

Mothers gave very similar responses regarding practices relating to homework. For instance, they were equally likely to state that their child's teacher gets parents to sign homework (79% I; 81% UOK; and 76% UNH). Mothers (or their partners) in each group signed homework on average about two to four times a week, were equally likely to state that someone at home helps their child with homework (84.7% I; 86.7% UOK; and 87.3% UNH) and to state that, on average, between 10 minutes and half an hour was spent helping their child with homework each day. The person who tended to help the child with homework was similar across both uninvolved and involved groups (i.e., mostly mother, then father, sister, and brother) (Table 56). However, the small sample of pupils that were interviewed said that their fathers helped most frequently.

Table 56

## Percentages of Family Members Who Help Child With Homework

Family member	UOK (n: 138) %	UNH (n: 81) %	UNH (n: 81) %	Total (n: 340) %
Mother	66.9	68.8	63.0	68.8
Father	39.7	45.3	43.2	42.1
Sister	8.3	16.7	17.3	13.8
Brother	6.6	10.9	16.0	10.6

UNH mothers were significantly less likely than either UOK or I mothers to report that they or their partner talked to their child about something that the child had read or seen on television (74%, 86% and 91% respectively,  $\chi^2=11.39$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.01$ ), or that they checked what their child was reading or watching (76%; 91%; and 93%;  $\chi^2=14.47$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

Mothers were very similar in their reports of the frequency with which they talked to their child about school (almost every day), looked at things their child did at school (almost every day), read to their child (about once a week), and listened to their child read (more than once a week). When their child was younger, all groups of mothers had listened to their child read more than once a week. However, there were differences in the frequency with which mothers read to their child when the child was younger with UNH mothers reading significantly less often. On a 6-point scale (with 1="never," 2="less than once a month," 3="once or twice a month," 4="once a week," 5="more than once a week," 6="every day,"), the mean for UNH mothers ( $n=80$ ) was 4.7 compared to 5.3 for I mothers ( $n=121$ ) and 5.2 for UOK mothers ( $n=138$ ) ( $F=5.91$ ,  $df=2,336$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

Groups also differed in the extent to which mothers read newspapers or books, with significantly fewer UNH mothers stating that they had time for such reading than either involved or UOK mothers (79% compared with 90% and 90% respectively;  $\chi^2=6.13$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Mothers reported to a similar extent that partners had time for reading newspapers or books (86%, 91%, and 81% respectively for involved,

UOK and UNH). When asked whether their children took any lessons outside of school (e.g., art, music, sports coaching), UNH mothers (14%) reported that their children took such lessons to a lesser extent than did UOK (29%) mothers. The difference between the groups was significant ( $\chi^2=7.43$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

Children from all groups were equally likely to have a hobby/hobbies (over 90% in each case). Hobbies were initiated (in order of frequency) by children themselves (29%), by someone outside the family (21%), by mother (13%), by father (13%), by siblings (10%), and by both parents (7%).

Three of ten questions designed to assess the extent to which mothers promoted their children's independence showed significant differences between the groups (Table 57). Involved mothers would allow their child to make friends and visit their homes, and to sleep at a friend's home overnight when they were significantly younger than children of both groups of uninvolved mothers. However, both UNH and I mothers would allow their child to stay at home alone while they went out for a few hours at a significantly younger age than UOK mothers.

#### Knowledge of Child's Progress and Aspirations for Child

Mothers in the three groups rated in a similar fashion their child's liking of school on a 5-point scale and his/her confidence at school on a 4-point scale. However, UNH mothers rated their child (on a 5-point scale with 1="don't know," 2="not as good as most," 3="around the middle," 4="better than most," 5="the very

best in the class”) as doing significantly less well at school relative to his/her classmates overall and in English. For mathematics, children of UNH mothers received a significantly lower rating than children of UOK mothers (Table 58).

Table 57

Average Age at Which Child Would Be Allowed to Perform Activities Independently

Activity	Average Age in Years						Scheffé ( $p < .05$ )
	I	UOK	UNH	F	df	p	
To make friends and visit their homes	6.63 (n: 120)	7.66 (n: 137)	7.65 (n: 81)	5.1	2,335	<.01	I≠UNH I≠UOK
To sleep at a friend's home overnight	10.5 (n: 118)	11.4 (n: 130)	11.7 (n: 78)	3.75	2,323	<.05	I≠UOK I≠UNH
To stay at home alone for a few hours at night	13.1 (n: 115)	13.6 (n: 130)	12.9 (n: 81)	3.21	2,323	<.05	I≠UOK UOK≠ UNH

Most mothers in the three groups saw good training at school and good training at home as contributing to their child's success at school. Lesser numbers attributed a role to ability and effort and, a much smaller number, a role to luck. There were, however, no significant differences between the groups in the frequency with which they attributed their child's success to any of these factors (Table 59).

Table 58

Mothers' Rating of Child's Ability Compared to Classmates,  
Overall, in English, and in Math

	I	UOK	UNH	Total	F	df	p	Scheffé ( $p < .05$ )
Overall	3.43 (n: 121)	3.35 (n: 138)	3.04 (n: 81)	3.30 (n: 340)	6.32	2,337	<.01	I*UNH UOK*UNH
English	3.47 (n: 120)	3.41 (n: 135)	3.16 (n: 81)	3.37 (n: 336)	3.83	2,333	<.05	I*UNH UOK*UNH
Math	3.18 (n: 119)	3.31 (n: 136)	2.97 (n: 80)	3.18 (n: 335)	3.19	2,332	<.05	UOK*UNH

Table 59

Percentages of Mothers Who Attributed Their Child's  
Current Success at School to Varying Factors

	I (n: 112)	UOK (n: 123)	UNH (n: 70)	Total	
	%	%	%	%	(n)
Ability	90	86	76	85	(305)
Effort	78	85	80	81	(305)
Good school training	97	98	97	98	(304)
Good home training	90	94	91	92	(305)
Luck	55	52	44	51	(304)

When asked what would make their child do better at school, groups again reported similar patterns of agreement (Table 60). A majority felt that more effort would help their child. A smaller majority felt that ability would. Minorities identified luck, better training at home or better training at school. The relatively small numbers of parents that saw a role for changed conditions in the home or at school in affecting children's performance is of particular significance for an intervention project such as the HSCL scheme.

Table 60  
Percentages of Mothers Choosing Various Attributions for  
What Would Make Their Child do Better

	I % (n)	UOK % (n)	UNH % (n)	Total % (n)
Trying harder	72 (120)	70 (138)	81 (81)	73 (339)
More ability	61 (117)	59 (138)	54 (81)	59 (336)
More luck	39 (118)	38 (138)	41 (81)	39 (337)
Better training at home	35 (118)	33 (138)	46 (81)	36 (337)
Better training at school	22 (118)	19 (138)	25 (81)	21 (337)

Mothers were asked how far they thought their child would go in school (expectations) and how far they would like him or her to go (aspirations). Responses were reported on a 5-point scale with 1=sixth grade primary, 2=1-2 years post-primary



but no exam, 3=Junior Certificate, 4=Leaving Certificate, and 5=College. The majority of mothers in each group expected their child to go as far as the Leaving Certificate (I 58%; UOK 53%; UNH 65%). However, both I and UOK mothers had significantly higher expectations and hopes for their child than did UNH mothers (Tables 61, 62).

Table 61

## Mean Values of Mothers' Expectations for Their Child's Education

I (n: 121)	UOK (n: 137)	UNH (n: 81)	Total (n: 339)	F	df	p	Scheffé (p<.05)
4.34	4.44	3.95	4.29	14.45	2,336	<.001	I*UNH UOK*UNH

Table 62

## Mean Values of Mothers' Aspirations for Their Child's Education

I (n: 121)	UOK (n: 138)	UNH (n: 81)	Total (n: 340)	F	df	p	Scheffé (p<.05)
4.60	4.66	4.33	4.56	9.55	2,337	<.001	I*UNH UOK*UNH

### School-Related Attitudes

The attitudes of mothers in all groups were very similar regarding the extent to which they would like to have stayed on at school (I 76.9%; UOK 75.9%; and UNH 72.5%). There were, however, differences between the groups relating to their involvement in their children's education. UNH mothers felt that they could help their child at school to a significantly lesser extent (on a 5-point rating scale where 1="don't know," 2="cannot help at all," 3="can help only a little," 4="can help a fair amount," and 5="can help a lot") than did either I or UOK mothers. Their average rating was 4.05 compared to 4.35 for I and 4.33 for UOK mothers ( $F = 5.41$ ,  $df = 2,337$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Involved mothers were less likely (on a 5-point scale with 1="disagree a lot," 2="disagree a bit," 3="don't know," 4="agree a bit," and 5="agree a lot") than either UOK or UNH mothers to feel that they were intruding if they went to the school without being invited and more likely than uninvolved mothers to say that they should be given credit when their child did well in school (Table 63).

UNH mothers were more likely than I mothers and UOK mothers to agree that when teachers asked parents to help their child it usually took a lot of work on their part to give that help. Differences between groups relating to being told about their children's school progress or leaving all school work to teachers were not significant. The large proportion of mothers in all groups who agreed that all teaching and helping with school work should be left to teachers is surprising.

Table 63

Mean Values for Mothers' Agreement Ratings to a Number of Attitude Statements

Attitude Statement	I Average agreement rating (n: 121)	UOK Average agreement rating (n: 138)	UNH Average agreement rating (n: 81)	Total	F	df	p	Scheffé ( $p < .05$ )
I would feel I was intruding if I went to the school without being invited	1.32	1.65	1.82	1.57	5.20	2,337	<.01	I*UOK I*UNH
I should be given credit when my child does well at school	3.23	2.91	2.68	2.97	3.55	2,337	<.05	I*UNH
When teachers ask parents to help their child it usually takes a lot of work	2.65	2.94	3.41	2.95	6.36	2,337	<.01	I*UOK I*UNH UOK* UNH
I would like to be told more about how my child is getting on at school	3.08	3.54	3.42	3.35	2.90	2,337	.06	
Parents should leave all teaching and helping with school work to the teachers	4.47	4.33	4.11	4.33	2.91	2,337	.06	

### Knowledge and Attitudes Related to the HSCL Program in Their Child's School

The vast majority of mothers (86%) were aware of the existence of the HSCL program in their child's school. As would be expected, this included practically all I mothers (98%). (It is possible that the remaining 2% did not know that the activities they were involved in were part of a HSCL program.) An encouraging majority of both UOK (81%) and UNH (75%) mothers were also aware of the program. These findings suggest that efforts at promoting awareness of the HSCL program among parents had been successful.

Involved mothers were significantly more likely to have found out about the program through a school meeting than were either UOK or UNH mothers ( $\chi^2 = 7.98$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Table 64). Involved and UNH mothers were significantly more likely than UOK mothers to have found out about the program through a visit from the coordinator ( $\chi^2 = 20.78$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ ). While UNH mothers were categorized as uninvolved for the purposes of this interview, these findings confirm that, in fact, coordinators are reaching some of them through home visits.

Parents also networked among themselves about HSCL. The majority of I (80%) mothers had told another parent about HSCL, half (52%) had gone with another parent to a HSCL activity for her first time, and one-fifth (22%) had taken another parent along with them to a HSCL activity for their first time (Table 65).

Table 64

## Percentages of Mothers Who Found Out About HSCL in Various Ways

Found out through	I		UOK		UNH		Total	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
Letter sent home	75	(118)	77	(111)	71	(62)	75	(291)
Notice at school	56	(117)	53	(110)	59	(61)	56	(288)
Another parent	30	(118)	37	(109)	34	(61)	34	(288)
School meeting	46	(117)	31	(109)	28	(61)	37	(287)
Visit from coordinator	33	(117)	9	(109)	32	(60)	24	(286)

Table 65

## Percentages of Mothers Who Communicated With Other Parents About HSCL

	I	UOK	UNH	Total	$\chi^2$	df	p
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)			
Told another parent about the program	80 (n: 119)	42 (n: 112)	42 (n: 62)	57 (n: 293)	41.45	2	<.001
Brought another parent along to a HSCL activity for their first time	52 (n: 119)	13 (n: 112)	19 (n: 62)	30 (n: 293)	45.39	2	<.001
Was taken to a HSCL activity by another parent for my first time	22 (n: 119)	11 (n: 110)	8 (n: 62)	15 (n: 291)	8.25	2	<.05

Both groups of uninvolved mothers had also networked about HSCL, although to a lesser extent than I mothers. Forty-two percent of both UOK and UNH mothers had told another parent about HSCL. Further, although not consistently involved, some of these had also brought another parent along to a HSCL activity for their first time (13% UOK and 19% UNH) and were taken to a HSCL activity by another parent for their first time (11% UOK and 8% UNH).

### Home Visits

Significantly fewer UOK mothers (only 18%) knew that someone from the school visited parents at home than either UNH (35%) or I (43%) mothers ( $\chi^2=19.28$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p<.001$ ). A school staff person had visited twice as many homes of UNH (41%) and I (41%) mothers than of UOK (20%) mothers ( $\chi^2=15.52$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In most cases it was the coordinator who had visited the home (94% for I and 88% for both UOK and UNH). Almost all mothers found these visits helpful (96% of I and UOK groups and all the UNH group). The most popular reasons why mothers perceived home visits as helpful are presented in Table 66. The greatest numbers perceived the visit as helpful because of the information it provided to them. More UNH mothers were likely to attribute the helpfulness of the visit to the provision of information and to the (caring) approach and personality of the visitor, whereas more involved mothers referred to the ease of interaction between themselves and the visitor in their own home. It may be that for I mothers their relationship with the coordinator

has gone beyond the primarily practical basis of needing information and initial caring contact to being able to open up and express more personal needs.

Table 66

Percentages of Involved and Uninvolved Mothers Who Gave Varying Reasons Why They Considered Home Visits as Helpful

Reason why visit was helpful	I (n: 49) %	UOK (n: 27) %	UNH (n: 35) %	Total (n: 111) %
Provided information to mother	40.8	40.7	57.1	45.9
Visitor's approach and personality (were caring)	16.3	25.9	34.3	24.3
Ease of interaction between mother and visitor in own home	24.5	18.5	8.6	18.0

#### Attitudes to HSCL Practices and to the People Involved

Mothers were asked whether a number of HSCL practices were for the better, made no difference, or were for the worse. The practices were rated on a 4-point scale with 1="don't know," 2="worse," 3="no difference," and 4="better") and were predominantly perceived as being for the better (Table 67). Having parent classes in the school and parents helping with school activities were almost exclusively considered to be for the better by all three groups. Over 90% saw having a room in the school that parents can use as being for the better but there

Table 67  
Mean Values for Mothers' Ratings of HSCL Practices

	I (n: 121)	UOK (n: 138)	UNH (n: 80)	Total (n: 339)	F	df	p	Scheffé ( $p < .05$ )
Having classes for parents in the school that are organized by the coordinator	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	1.63	2,336	.20	
Having parents helping with activities in the school	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	1.05	2,336	.35	
Having a room in the school that parents can use	4.0	3.9	3.9	3.9	7.6	2,336	<.001	I*UOK
Having parents help teachers in the classroom	3.8	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.04	2,336	<.05	
Having people in the community help with school activities	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.7	.90	2,333	.41	
Having parents act as leaders at classes for other parents	3.7	3.5	3.4	3.6	6.5	2,335	<.05	I*UNH I*UOK



were significant differences in opinions on this matter between the I mothers and the UOK mothers. Having parents help the teacher in the classroom was also generally perceived as being for the better. There is a significant difference between UOK mothers and I mothers in the extent to which they felt that having parents help teachers was for the better ( $\chi^2=8.399$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<.05$ ), with I mothers viewing this practice in a more positive light. Having people from the community (who have no children in the school) helping with school activities was also perceived as being for the better, though the differences between the groups were not significant. Having parents act as leaders at classes for other parents was least often seen as being for the better, the differences being significant between both I and UNH groups and I and UOK groups ( $\chi^2=11.633$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<.01$ ). It is noteworthy that for the three HSCL practices showing significant differences between the groups, it was UOK mothers more often than UNH mothers who differed from I mothers. It seems that UOK mothers saw less need for a room for parents in the school, less need for parents to help teachers in classrooms, or less reason for a parent to act as leaders at parent classes.

When asked what they thought of the group of people who were involved in the HSCL program, I mothers made more positive comments than either group of uninvolved mothers. For example, more I mothers mentioned positive personality attributes of those who were involved (68.1% compared with 44.5% and 38.3% for UOK and UNH mothers respectively) or mentioned the time or

effort put into involvement (26.1% compared with 16.4% and 15% respectively). Some I mothers (16.8%) noted the positive interaction among those involved whereas both uninvolved groups largely did not (2.7% and 5.1% respectively for UOK and UNH). These patterns are perhaps to be expected since many of the uninvolved (28.2% UOK and 26.7% UNH) said that they did not know anything about the people who were involved. Both uninvolved groups were also more likely than I mothers to be more non-committal or slightly negative (e.g., "they're all right, I'm sure" ) in their responses (13.6% and 18.3% compared with 7.5%).

### Conclusion

Involving mothers in personal development courses has obviously been a useful way of encouraging parents to become involved in HSCL programs. However, a further step would seem to be required to help parents to learn new ways of assisting their children's educational development. The reason most frequently given by mothers for getting involved in activities in their child's school was to become more involved in the education of their child. Parents who had helped the teacher in the classroom found this activity more beneficial in terms of their becoming involved in the education of their child than parents who had been involved in courses.

Participation in courses has its own benefits, however, particularly in terms of helping parents to get to know other parents and in building parent confidence.

Interview responses gave some insight into the reasons for inconsistent attendance at courses, the main reason being family duties. This points to the importance of a support system for mothers in encouraging them to attend courses by accommodating and supporting them in their family duties as much as possible (e.g., through the provision of child care facilities).

The finding that few parents appear to have taken a leading role in parent activities indicates a need to develop leadership qualities among parents. The presence of parents as leaders, while seen less frequently as a positive development by uninvolved compared to involved mothers, could, perhaps, become one of the ways of encouraging more parents to become involved in HSCL programs in the schools.

The most striking demographic differences distinguish UNH mothers from I and UOK groups. UNH mothers were more likely than the other two groups to come from a family in which both parents were unemployed. This finding points to the need for strategies to address problems associated with unemployment. UNH parents were also more likely to come from a one-parent family, and to have more children.

Uninvolved mothers considered to need help also displayed certain practices and attitudes which would be expected to inhibit rather than to encourage their children's achievement. Compared to involved mothers, both groups of uninvolved mothers talked to their child's teacher less frequently. UNH

mothers were less likely than other mothers to read newspapers or books/to talk to their child about something he/she had read or seen on television. UNH mothers read less often to their child when he/she was younger; perceived their child to be doing less well at school than classmates; and felt that they could help their child at school to a lesser extent. Particularly significant is the fact that UNH mothers felt less in a position to help their child at school than involved or UOK mothers. Increased effort to devise activities that would enhance UNH mothers' confidence in, and understanding of, how to support their child's educational development, would seem to be worthwhile.

Three-quarters of UNH mothers and four-fifths of UOK mothers were already aware of HSCL programs in schools, mostly as a result of a letter sent home or of seeing a notice at the school. There was also evidence of networking among parents as some uninformed (as well as involved) mothers had learned of the HSCL program from other parents. This finding is corroborated by another finding that almost four-fifths of involved mothers stated that they had told another parent about the program. Involved mothers appear to seek most information about their children (they talk to the teacher more often and also say that they would like to be told more about how their child is getting on at school). Uninformed mothers, particularly UNH, were less likely to initiate such communication. In this respect, home visits would appear to be vital in encouraging greater communication between UNH parents and the school. While

coordinators clearly targeted UNH families for home visits, all groups were overwhelmingly positive in their responses to such visits which were perceived to be most helpful (particularly by UNH mothers) in terms of the information that was provided through them to mothers.

## CHAPTER X

### PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT

#### Achievements of Pupils

Measures of pupils' achievements were used to obtain baseline data for later study of the impact of HSCL programs on pupils in the six selected schools. The data were intended to provide a description of pupil achievements at the beginning of the second year of the HSCL scheme with a view to collecting follow-up data after four years. All the tests had been developed at the Educational Research Centre for use in Irish schools. Testing was carried out during November and December, 1991. Prior to testing, each school was visited to explain the purpose and the nature of the testing to principals and coordinators. Pupils at three grade levels (first, third, and fifth) were tested in reading and mathematics.

#### Achievement Tests

##### Reading

In assessing reading, the Appraisal of Early Reading Skills test was used for first grade, the Drumcondra English Test, Level 2, Form B (vocabulary and

comprehension) for third grade, and the English Reading Test, Form C, Version D91 (vocabulary and comprehension) for fifth grade.

The Appraisal of Early Reading Skills test is a criterion-referenced test designed to assess a number of skills grouped under pre-reading and beginning reading tasks (see Table 68). The test consists of 68 items organized into 17 objectives, each objective being made up of two, three, four, five, or six items. A pupil is considered to have “mastered” an objective if he or she answers correctly two items in the case of objectives for which either two or three items are included, at least three items for objectives with four items, and at least four items for objectives with five or six items. The skills assessed are: following directions, auditory discrimination, visual discrimination, letter recognition, word recognition, sentence comprehension, and passage comprehension. A pupil's score is the number of objectives mastered.

The Drumcondra English Test, Level 2, Form B is a norm-referenced measure of achievement in English which was standardized for use in Irish schools. Two forms (A and B) of the test are available; Form B is recommended for use at the beginning of the school year. The test is made up of four sections: Test I - Vocabulary; Test II - Spelling; Test III - Language; and Test IV - Comprehension. Third grade pupils completed only the vocabulary (30 items) and comprehension (40 items) sections of the test. A pupil's score is the number of items answered correctly, which can be transformed into a standard score.

The English Reading Test, Form C, Version D91 is made up of two sections: Test I - Vocabulary (40 items); and Test II - Comprehension (40 items). Again, a pupil's score is the number of items answered correctly.

Table 68

**Skills Assessed in Appraisal of Early Reading Skills  
and Corresponding Objective Numbers**

Skills	Objectives
<b>Prereading Tasks</b>	
Following directions	1, 5
Auditory discrimination	2, 3, 7
Visual discrimination	8
Letter recognition	4
<b>Beginning Reading Tasks</b>	
Word recognition	6, 9, 10, 13
Sentence comprehension	11, 12, 14
Passage comprehension	15, 16, 17

### Mathematics

The Drumcondra Criterion-Referenced Mathematics Tests (DCRMT), Levels 1, 3, and 5 were used to assess mathematical achievement. The tests are based on the elementary school mathematics curriculum for first (Level 1), third (Level 3), and fifth (Level 5) grades and are designed to provide a detailed profile of what pupils have



learned in mathematics. Since testing was carried out towards the beginning of the school year, it is likely that pupils had not covered some areas of the curriculum at the time they were assessed.

Level 1 of the DCRMT test contains a total of 114 items which make up 39 objectives in item sets of either two, three, or four items. A pupil is considered to have “mastered” an objective if he or she answers correctly two items in the case of objectives for which either two or three items were included, and three items in the case of objectives for which four items were included. The categories of objectives covered by the test and corresponding item numbers are given in Table 69. A pupil's score is the number of objectives mastered.

Table 69

Skills Assessed in DCRMT Level 1 and Corresponding Item and Objective Numbers

Skills	Item numbers	Objective numbers
Operations with whole numbers	1-34	1-10
Whole number structure	35-79	11-25
Measurement	80-91	26-31
Geometry	92-97	32-33
Charts and graphs	98-101	34
Fractions	102-103	35
Problem solving	104-114	36-39

Level 3 of the DCRMT test contains a total of 105 items making up 41 objectives. Again, the objectives are assessed in item sets of two, three, or four items and “mastery” is determined as for Level 1 of the test. The categories of objectives covered by the test and corresponding item numbers are given in Table 70. A pupil's score is the number of objectives mastered.

Table 70

## Skills Assessed in DCRMT Level 3 and Corresponding Item and Objective Numbers

Skills	Item numbers	Objective numbers
Operations with whole numbers	1-33	1-11
Whole number structure	34-35	12-20
Fractions and decimals	56-67	21-25
Measurement	68-84	26-32
Geometry	85-91	33-35
Charts and graphs	92-95	36
Problem solving	96-105	37-41

Level 5 of the DCRMT test contains a total of 116 items measuring 48 objectives (covered by item sets of two, three, or four items and with “mastery” determined as for Levels 1 and 3). The categories of objectives covered by the test and corresponding item numbers are given in Table 71. A pupil's score is the number of objectives mastered.

Table 71

## Skills Assessed in DCRMT Level 5 and Corresponding Item and Objective Numbers

Skills	Item numbers	Objective numbers
Operations with whole numbers	1-16	1-4
Whole number structure	17-39	5-12
Fractional number structure	40-55	13-20
Operations with fractions	56-73	21-29
Decimal number structure	74-87	30-35
Operations with decimals	88-93	36-38
Geometry	94-102	39-42
Charts and graphs	103-106	43
Problem solving	107-116	44-48

A training day was held for test administrators during which test administration procedures were explained and demonstrated and the background to the HSCL scheme was outlined.

Tests were administered to whole-class groups with the exception of the Appraisal of Early Reading Skills, for which pupils were tested in groups of four. The class teacher facilitated the selection of pupils so that pupils of similar ability formed a group. The English tests were administered first in one session and on a separate day from the mathematics tests. At first grade, 365 pupils completed the Appraisal of

Early Reading Skills test; 220 third grade pupils completed the Drumcondra English Test; and 252 fifth grade pupils completed the D91 test.

The mathematics tests were administered in three sessions on three separate days and the number of pupils present varied across the sessions. In first grade, 352 pupils were present for session 1, 350 for session 2, and 355 for session 3. In third grade, 215 pupils were present for session 1, 221 for session 2, and 219 for session 3. In fifth grade, 243 pupils were present for session 1, 250 for session 2, and 255 for session 3.

Test administrators recorded observations in relation to the tests, e.g., late arrivals, absences, reasons for incomplete tests, difficulties pupils had in completing tests, and teachers' reactions to tests/testing.

The correlation between the reading and mathematics tests for first grade was .54 (n: 316;  $p=.00$ ). At third grade, the correlation between the tests was .63 (n: 194;  $p=.00$ ), while at fifth grade it was also .63 (n: 222;  $p=.00$ ).

## **Pupil Performance**

### **Appraisal of Early Reading Skills**

Details of percentages of pupils achieving mastery of each objective on the Appraisal of Early Reading Skills Test are given in Table 72. Figure 1 contains a histogram of the frequency distribution of total objectives mastered.

Virtually all pupils could follow directions by indicating which of several pictures had been named by the tester and 85% could follow directions relating to positional concepts. Over 90% demonstrated letter recognition by identifying lower-case letters pronounced by the tester. A similar percentage demonstrated auditory discrimination by identifying a picture of an object that had the same initial sound as a stimulus object or as pronounced by the tester, but less than three quarters could identify a picture of an object with the same final sounds of a stimulus object.

About 90% of pupils demonstrated word recognition by identifying the written form of a spoken word and by matching one of two nouns to an appropriate picture. However, pupils were less successful in displaying word recognition when they were required to match a word to a picture (under 70%), and less than half could select a word to match an appropriate picture. Less than 80% of pupils displayed the visual discrimination required to match equivalent letter strings.

About half the pupils displayed sentence comprehension (by selecting a sentence that represented an accompanying picture, selecting one of three words to complete a sentence with a picture clue provided, or indicating whether a simple sentence was true or false).

Table 72

**Appraisal of Early Reading Skills: Statement of Objectives and Percentage  
of Pupils (n: 365) Who Mastered Each Objective**

Objective	Percentage Achieving Mastery
1. Demonstrate ability to follow directions by indicating which of several pictures have been named by the tester (3 items).	99.2
2. Demonstrate auditory discrimination by identifying a picture of an object that has the same initial as the stimulus object (4 items)	91.5
3. Demonstrate auditory discrimination by identifying a picture of an object that has the same initial sound as a sound pronounced by the tester (4 items).	93.9
4. Demonstrate letter recognition by identifying lower case letters pronounced by the tester (5 items).	95.3
5. Demonstrate ability to follow directions relating to positional concepts (5 items).	84.7
6. Demonstrate word recognition by matching one of two nouns to an appropriate picture (5 items).	88.5
7. Demonstrate auditory discrimination by identifying a picture of an object that has the same final sounds as a stimulus object (4 items).	72.9
8. Demonstrate visual discrimination by matching letter strings that are identical (5 items).	79.2
9. Demonstrate word recognition by identifying the written form of a word spoken by the tester (4 items).	91.2
10. Demonstrate word recognition by matching a word to an appropriate picture (5 items).	69.3
11. Demonstrate sentence comprehension by selecting a picture that represents an accompanying sentence (2 items).	56.4

Table 72—Continued

Objective	Percentage Achieving Mastery
12. Demonstrate sentence comprehension by selecting one of three words to complete a sentence with a picture clue provided (2 items).	51.8
13. Demonstrate word recognition by selecting a word to match an appropriate picture (6 items).	45.8
14. Demonstrate sentence comprehension by indicating whether a simple sentence is true or false (2 items).	45.8
15. Demonstrate passage comprehension by solving a simple verbal riddle (4 items).	15.1
16. Demonstrate passage comprehension by answering questions about a simple passage (4 items).	21.1
17. Demonstrate passage comprehension by answering questions about a more complex passage (4 items).	4.7

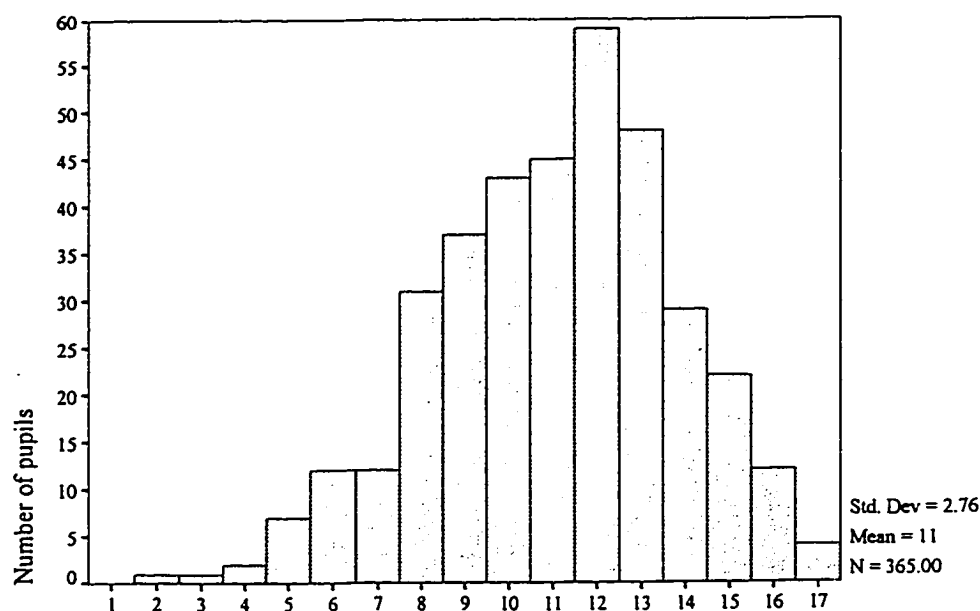


Figure 1. Histogram of Frequency Distribution of Total Objectives Mastered  
Appraisal of Early Reading Skills: Grade 1.

Skills in passage comprehension were less than well developed among most pupils. Only 20% correctly answered questions about a simple passage, while 15% could solve a simple verbal riddle, and only 5% could answer questions about a more complex passage.

The overall mean raw score was 11.06 (SD=2.76; n: 365) (maximum possible score = 17.00).

In a separate administration of the test for another study, pupils from two other schools in areas designated as disadvantaged achieved similar results on the test (Kellaghan, 1990).

An earlier version of the test was used to test pupils whose teachers had participated in the development and evaluation of a structured programme for infant classrooms in mathematics, reading, and oral language (Archer & O'Rourke, 1985). The 17 objectives contained in the earlier version were equivalent to those in the version used in this study. However, the earlier version contained a total of 77 items compared to 68 items in the more recent version. Eighteen classes of first grade pupils from schools in areas designated as disadvantaged were tested towards the end of June, 1985 (i.e., at the end of first grade).

In general, the pupils in the 1985 study performed better overall than those tested in this study. It is of interest that the differences in mastery of objectives were far less pronounced for objectives 1 to 9 which measure pre-reading skills (visual and auditory discrimination and some sight vocabulary) that pupils would be expected to



master prior to reading instruction, than for objectives 10 to 17 which measure reading skills (reading vocabulary and sentence and passage comprehension) that pupils would be expected to acquire during first grade.

### Drumcondra English Reading Test, Level 2, Form B

Third grade pupils completed vocabulary (30 items) and comprehension (40 items) sections of the test. The mean raw score for vocabulary was 12.63 (SD=6.01); the mean raw score for comprehension was 18.10 (SD=6.02); and the total mean score was 30.73 (SD=11.21). Figure 2 contains a histogram of the frequency distribution of total raw scores on the test.

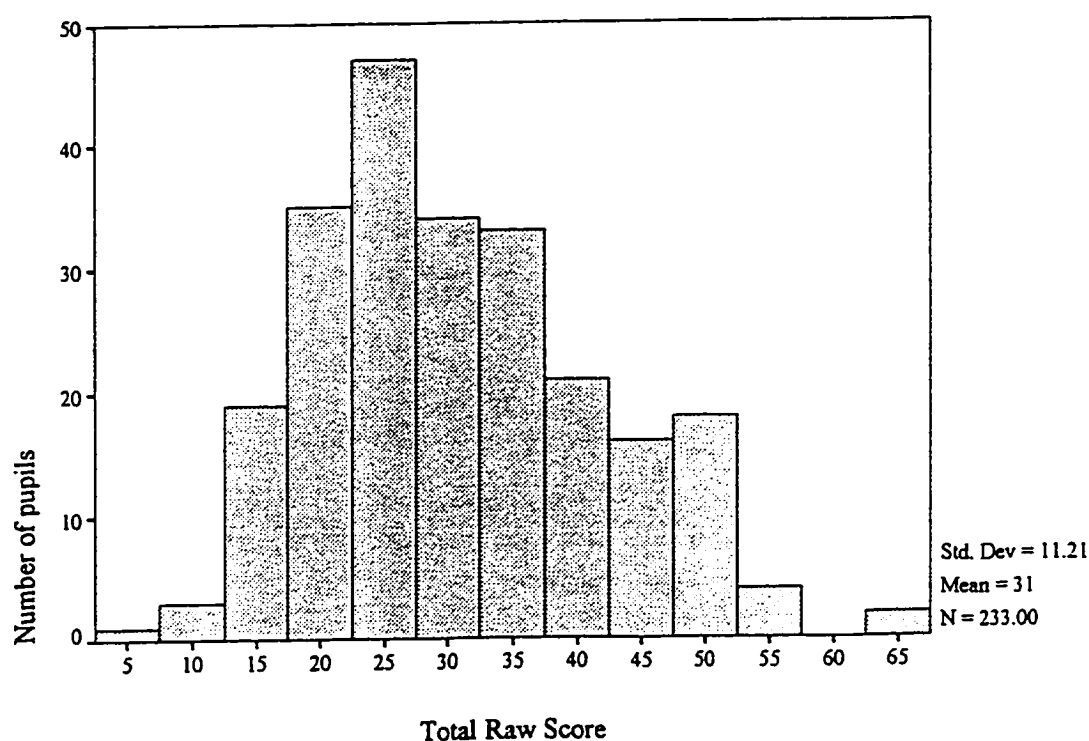


Figure 2. Histogram of Frequency Distribution of Total Raw Scores  
Drumcondra English Reading Test, Level 2: Grade 3.

When the mean raw scores were compared with the norms which were established for the test (in the fall of 1976) the raw scores appeared to be relatively high. Since there is some evidence that the test has got “easier” and that reading standards have improved since the standardization (Ireland: Department of Education, 1982; Review Body on Primary Curriculum, 1990), it is possible that the norms are no longer appropriate. Hence, comparisons with normative data will not be provided for this sample. The raw scores will be available for future comparisons, however, when further testing is carried out.

#### Drumcondra English Reading Test, Form C (Version D91)

Fifth grade pupils completed vocabulary (40 items) and comprehension (40 items) sections of the test. The mean raw score for vocabulary was 15.56 (SD=7.59); the mean raw score for comprehension, 23.30 (SD=7.82); and the total mean score 38.85 (SD=14.45). Figure 3 contains a histogram of the frequency distribution of total raw scores on the test.

The D91 test had been administered to a national sample of 1,818 pupils in February 1991 as part of a national reading survey (Martin, Forde, & Hickey, 1991). The mean raw scores were higher than those for this sample of pupils: vocabulary 21.45 (SD=8.69); comprehension 27.95 (SD=7.61); total 49.40 (SD=15.27). On the basis of national norms, the mean total reading score of pupils in the six schools was at

approximately the 26th percentile. The mean for the lowest scoring of the six schools was at the 7th percentile and for the highest scoring school at the 32nd percentile.

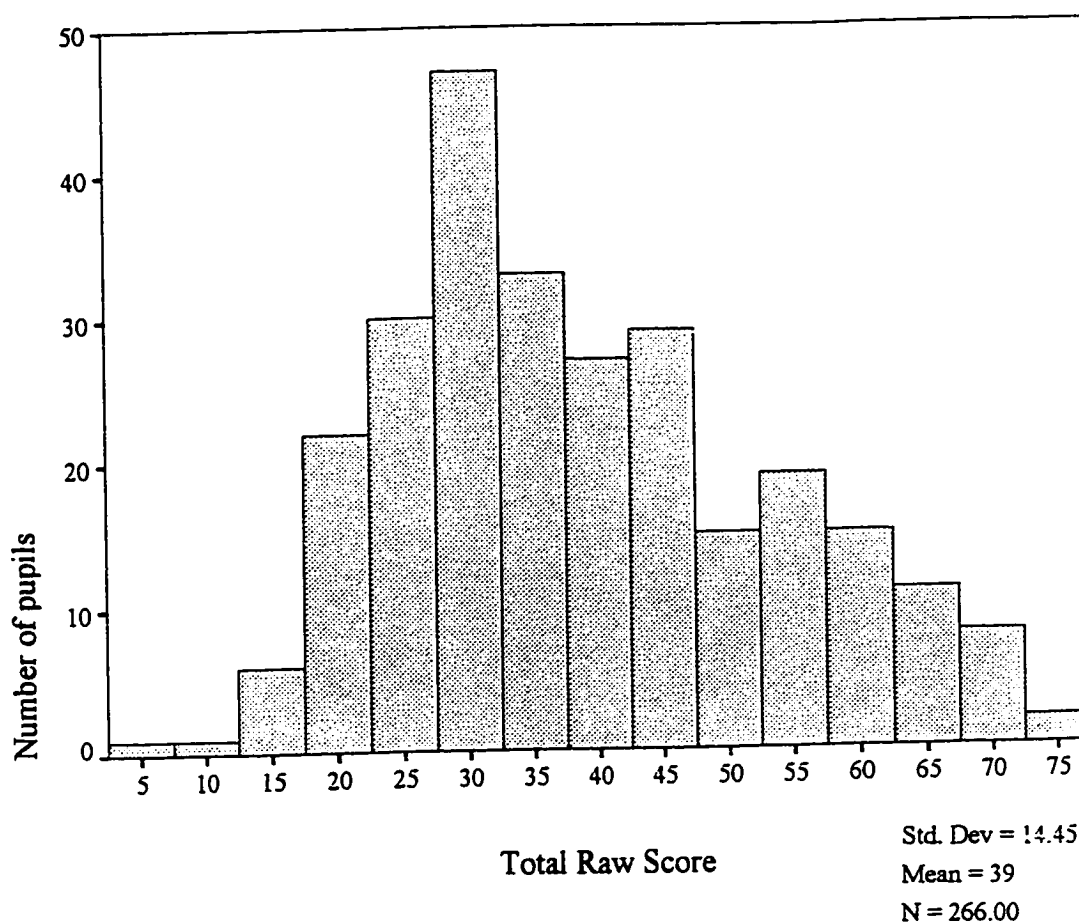


Figure 3. Histogram of Frequency Distribution of Total Raw Scores  
Drumcondra English Reading Test, Version D91: Grade 5.

#### Drumcondra Criterion-Referenced Mathematics Test - Level 1

Details of objectives measured and percentages of pupils achieving mastery on each are given in Table 73. Figure 4 shows a histogram of the frequency distribution of total objectives mastered on the test.

Table 73

**DCRMT Level 1: Statement of Objectives and Percentage of Pupils (n: 351)  
Who Mastered Each Objective**

Sections and Objectives	No. of Items	Percentage Achieving Mastery
<b>A. Operations with whole numbers</b>		
1. Add two single-digit numbers (0-5).	4	86.0
2. Add two single-digit numbers (0-9).	4	83.5
3. Add three single-digit numbers (0-5).	4	86.6
4. Add three single-digit numbers (0-9).	4	85.2
5. Add a single-digit number to a two-digit number without renaming (sum to 35).	2	55.6
6. Add a single-digit number to a two-digit number with renaming (sum to 35).	2	51.6
7. Subtract a single-digit number from a single-digit number (0-5).	4	40.2
8. Subtract a single-digit number from a single-digit number (0-9).	4	45.3
9. Subtract a single-digit number from a two-digit number (0-20).	4	35.3
10. Subtract a single-digit number from a two-digit number with renaming (0-30).	2	33.3
<b>B. Whole number structure</b>		
11. Perform additions with zero (0-10).	3	94.6
12. Perform subtractions with zero (0-10).	3	86.2
13. Count and order numbers on the number line (0-20).	3	55.0

Table 73—Continued

Sections and Objectives	No. of Items	Percentage Achieving Mastery
14. Construct number sentences to represent addition and subtraction situations (0-12).	3	30.7
15. Complete number sentences representing addition and subtraction situations (0-10).	3	32.4
16. Position numbers on the hundred square.	3	49.0
17. Complete simple number patterns on the hundred square.	3	55.6
18. Use the commutative property of addition to interchange one-digit numbers (0-9).	3	6.6
19. Use the associative property to group numbers for addition (addends) (0-10).	3	5.7
20. Count in 2s, 4s, and 10s.	3	16.6
21. Group in 2s, 4s, and 10s.	3	24.9
22. Identify the place value of digits in two-digit numbers.	3	9.7
23. Identify the place value of digits in numerals not exceeding 99.	3	11.7
24. Read and write numerals not exceeding 99.	3	85.7
25. Rename two-digit numbers not exceeding 30.	3	4.6
C1. Measurement		
26. Measure the length of an object in centimeters.	2	79.9
27. Measure the weight of an object using a nonstandard unit.	2	18.9
28. Measure the capacity of a container using a nonstandard unit.	2	22.0
29. Read time in one-hour and half-hour intervals.	2	38.7

Table 73—Continued

Sections and Objectives	No. of Items	Percentage Achieving Mastery
30. Write the value of a sum of money containing coins of various denominations (within 50p).	2	81.1
31. Change money (within 50p).	2	39.0
C2. Geometry		
32. Identify the number of corners or sides on regular shapes.	3	93.5
33. Identify a circle, triangle, square, rectangle, cube, and sphere.	3	60.7
C3. Charts and graphs		
34. Read and interpret simple pictograms (2, 3, or 4 categories).	4	27.1
C4. Fractions		
35. Identify one half of a region or set.	2	27.4
C5. Problem solving		
36. Solve problems involving the addition of two- and three-single digit numbers.	3	87.6
37. Solve money problems involving addition (within 50p).	2	60.5
38. Solve problems involving subtraction.	4	76.0
39. Solve money problems involving subtraction (within 50p).	2	39.0

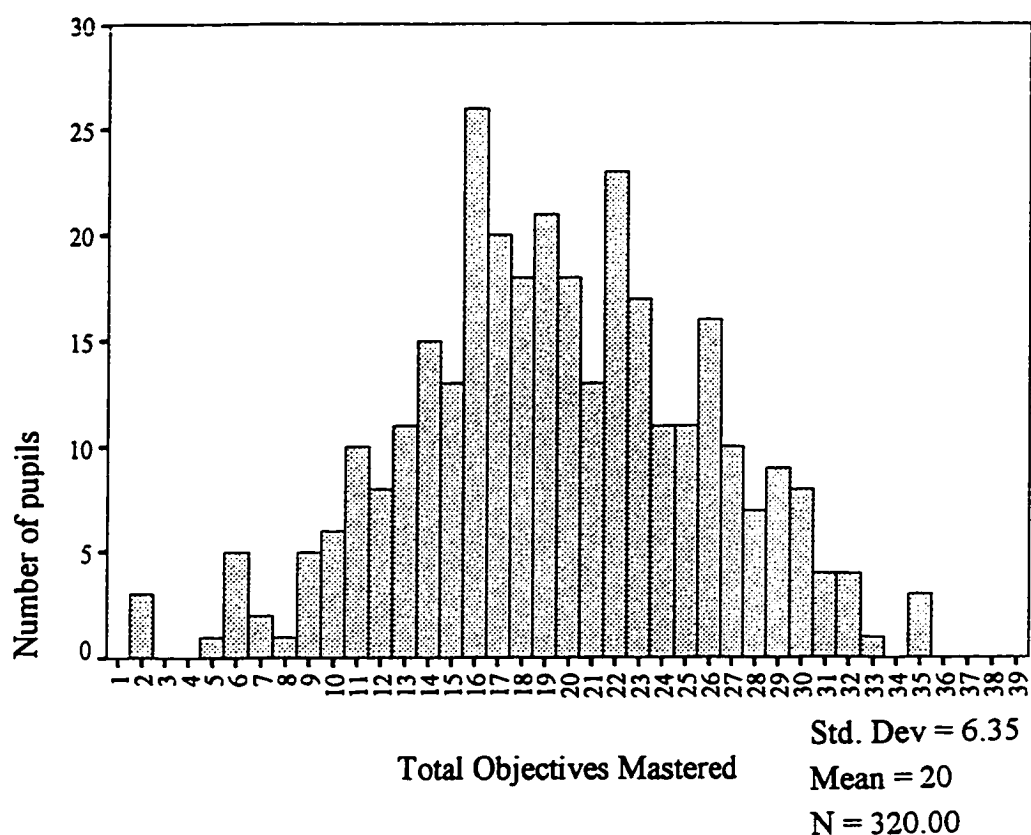


Figure 4. Histogram of Frequency Distribution of Total Objectives Mastered DCRMT, Level 1.

Operations With Whole Numbers. Over four-fifths of pupils were successful in completing addition operations with whole numbers (adding two and three single-digit numbers: 0-9). Just over half the pupils could add a single-digit number to a two-digit number (either with or without renaming - sum to 35). Over 40% succeeded in subtracting a single-digit number from a single-digit number (0-9) and over 30% could subtract a single-digit number from a two-digit number (with or without renaming 0-30).

**Whole Number Structure.** Virtually all pupils could perform additions with zero (0-10) while 86% could perform subtractions with zero (0-10). A similar percentage demonstrated ability to read and write numerals not exceeding 99. Over half the pupils counted and ordered numbers on the number line (0-20) and completed simple number patterns on the hundred square, while just under half could position numbers on the hundred square. About a third of pupils constructed and completed number sentences representing addition and subtraction situations (0-10).

About a quarter of pupils could group numbers in 2s, 4s, and 10s, while less than a fifth succeeded at counting in 2s, 4s, and 10s. About one-tenth could identify the place value of digits in two-digit numbers and in numerals not exceeding 99.

Pupils were less successful in demonstrating the use of the commutative property of addition to interchange one-digit numbers 0-9 (7%); using the associative property to group numbers for addition (addends 0-10) (6%); and in renaming two-digit numbers less than 30 (5%).

**Measurement.** Four-fifths of pupils could write the value of a sum of money containing coins of various denominations (up to 50p) and a similar proportion could measure the length of an object in centimeters. Just under 40% could change money (up to 50p) and could read time in one-hour and half-hour intervals. About a fifth were successful in measuring the capacity of a container and the weight of an object using a nonstandard unit.



**Geometry.** Over 90% of pupils correctly identified the number of corners or sides on regular shapes, while 60% could identify a circle, triangle, square, rectangle, cube, and sphere.

**Charts and Graphs and Fractions.** Over a quarter of pupils were successful in reading and interpreting simple pictograms (2, 3, or 4 categories) and a similar proportion could identify one half of a region or set.

**Problem Solving.** Almost 90% of pupils could solve addition problems with two and three single-digit numbers and over three quarters could solve similar subtraction problems. Sixty percent succeeded in solving addition problems with money (up to 50p) but under 40% solved subtraction problems with money (up to 50p).

The total mean score (number of objectives mastered) for all first grade pupils was 19.51 (SD=6.35; n: 320) (maximum possible score = 39).

### **Drumcondra Criterion-Referenced Mathematics Test - Level 3**

Details of objectives measured and percentages of pupils achieving mastery on each are given in Table 74. Figure 5 shows a histogram of the frequency distribution of total objectives mastered on the test.

**Operations With Whole Numbers.** Virtually all pupils were successful in adding two or three single-digit numbers, four-fifths could add one- or two-digit numbers to a

Table 74

**DCRMT Level 3: Statement of Objectives and Percentage of Pupils (n:215)  
Who Mastered Each Objective**

Sections and Objectives		No. of Items	Percentage Achieving Mastery
<b>A. Operations with whole numbers</b>			
1.	Add two or three single-digit numbers.	3	99.5
2.	Add a one- or two-digit number to a two-digit number with renaming.	3	79.1
3.	Add a two- or three-digit number to a three-digit number with renaming.	3	74.0
4.	Subtract a one- or two-digit number from a two-digit number without renaming.	4	88.8
5.	Subtract a one- or two-digit number from a two-digit number with renaming.	2	37.2
6.	Subtract a two- or three-digit number from a three-digit number with renaming.	3	56.3
7.	Multiply a single-digit number by a single-digit number (products <50).	3	82.8
8.	Multiply a two- or three-digit number by a single-digit number without renaming.	3	49.8
9.	Multiply a two- or three-digit number by a single-digit number with renaming.	3	18.1
10.	Divide a one- or two-digit number by a single-digit number less than or equal to 5 without a remainder.	3	40.0
11.	Divide a one- or two-digit number by a single-digit number greater than 5 without a remainder.	3	26.0

Table 74—Continued

Sections and Objectives	No. of Items	Percentage Achieving Mastery
<b>B1. Whole number structure</b>		
12. Perform multiplication and divisions involving 0, 1, and 10.	2	52.5
13. Construct number sentences to represent multiplication and division situations (single-digit factors).	3	83.3
14. Complete number sentences requiring division.	3	60.2
15. Identify two- and three-digit numbers on the number line.	2	58.4
16. Extend simple number sequences on the number line.	3	35.7
17. Identify the place value of the digits in numbers with not more than 4 digits.	3	77.4
18. Read and write numbers with not more than four digits.	2	57.5
19. Apply the commutative property in multiplication of single-digit numbers.	2	63.3
20. Apply the distributive property in multiplication of a two- or three-digit number by a single-digit number.	2	26.7
<b>B2. Fractions and decimals</b>		
21. Identify unit and compound fractions of a region (denominators of 2, 4, 8, 3, 6, 9, 5, and 10).	3	70.1
22. Identify unit and compound fractions of a set (denominators of 2, 4, 8, 3, 6, 9, 5, and 10).	2	33.5
23. Identify equivalent forms of unit fractions (denominators of 2, 4, 8, 3, 6, 9, 5, and 10).	3	31.7

Table 74—Continued

Sections and Objectives	No. of Items	Percentage Achieving Mastery
24. Order unit fractions (denominators of 2, 4, 8, 3, 6, 9, 5, and 10).	2	29.9
25. Convert a fraction with a denominator of 10 to a decimal and vice versa.	2	4.5
C1. Measurement		
26. Measure the length of an object in meters or centimeters (to nearest $\frac{1}{2}$ centimeter).	2	1.4
27. Convert metric measures of length, weight, and capacity from one unit level to another (two levels, centimeter, meter, gram, kilogram, milliliter, liter).	3	17.8
28. Convert measures of time from one unit level to another (minutes, hours, days, and weeks only).	3	58.0
29. Convert money from one unit level to another (£s and pence).	2	38.8
30. Read time in five minute intervals.	2	47.5
31. Determine the area of regular shapes by counting squares.	2	84.5
32. Determine the perimeter of simple regular shapes (triangle, square, rectangle).	3	32.4
C2. Geometry		
33. Identify properties of two-dimensional shapes.	2	74.0
34. Identify properties of three-dimensional shapes.	2	37.4
35. Identify two-dimensional shapes with an axis of symmetry.	3	48.4
C3. Charts and graphs		
36. Read and interpret bar charts.	4	57.1

Table 74—Continued

Sections and Objectives	No. of Items	Percentage Achieving Mastery
C4. Problem solving		
37. Solve problems involving multiplication of whole numbers.	2	33.3
38. Solve problems involving division of whole numbers.	2	31.1
39. Solve problems involving addition and subtraction applied to length, weight, and capacity.	2	54.3
40. Solve problems involving addition and subtraction of measures of money and time.	2	32.9
41. Solve problems involving unit fractions.	2	34.2

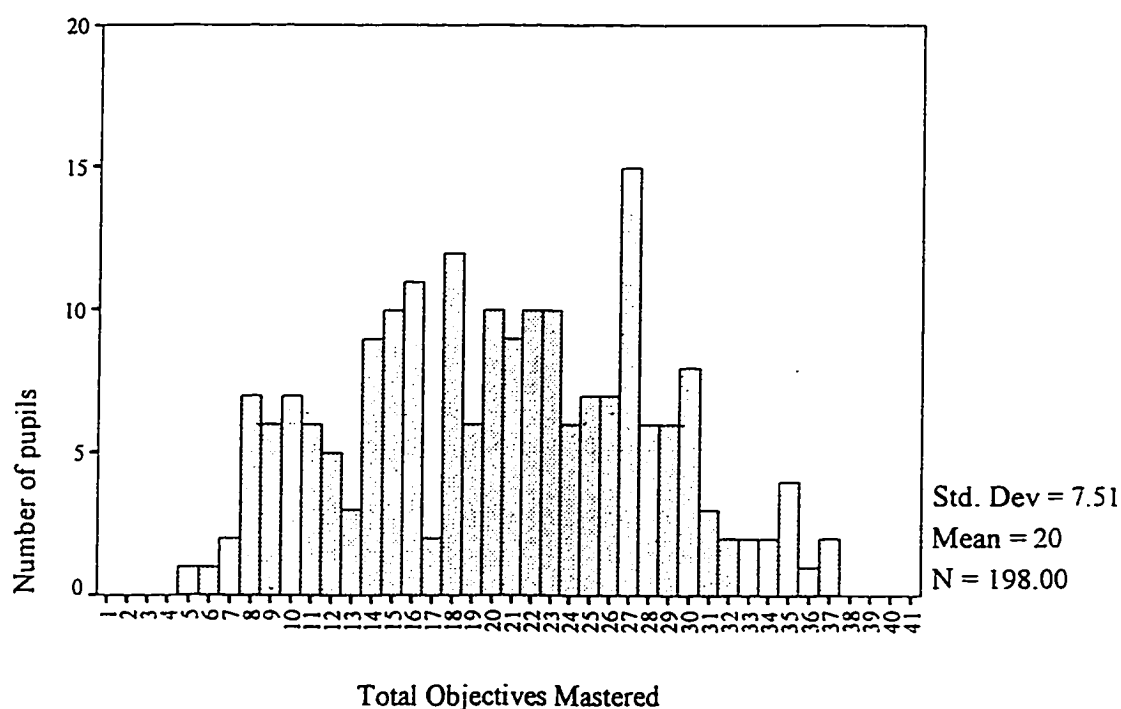


Figure 5. Histogram of Frequency Distribution of Total Objectives Mastered DCRMT, Level 3.

two-digit number with renaming, and about three-quarters could add a two- or three-digit number to a three-digit number with renaming.

Almost 90% of pupils could subtract a one- or two-digit number from a two-digit number without renaming. However, less than 60% could subtract a two- or three-digit number from a three-digit number with renaming, and less than 40% successfully subtracted a one- or two-digit number from a two-digit number with renaming.

Four-fifths of pupils could multiply one single-digit number by another (products  $< 50$ ). Half could multiply a two- or three-digit number by a single-digit number without renaming, while less than a fifth successfully multiplied a two- or three-digit number by a single-digit number with renaming.

Forty percent of pupils were successful in dividing one- or two-digit numbers by a single-digit number (less than or equal to 5) without a remainder. Over a quarter could do this when dividing by numbers greater than 5.

Whole Number Structure. More than four-fifths of pupils could construct number sentences to represent multiplication and division situations (single-digit factors), 60% could complete number sentences requiring division, and over half could perform multiplications and divisions involving 0, 1, and 10. Almost 60% of pupils successfully identified two- and three-digit numbers on the number line and under 40% could extend simple number sequences on the number line.

Just under four-fifths of pupils could identify the place value of the digits in numbers with not more than four digits and less than 60% could read and write numbers with not more than four digits. Over 60% of pupils were successful in applying the commutative property in multiplication of single-digit numbers while about a quarter could apply the distributive property in multiplication of a two- or three-digit number by a single-digit number.

Fractions and Decimals. Seventy percent of pupils successfully identified unit and compound fractions of a region (denominators of 2, 4, 8, 3, 6, 9, 5, and 10), 34% identified similar fractions of a set, 32% could identify equivalent forms of the unit fractions, and 30% could order the unit fractions. Only 5% could convert a fraction (denominator of 10) to a decimal and vice versa.

Measurement. Few pupils (just over 1%) were successful at measuring the length of an object in meters or centimeters (to nearest  $\frac{1}{2}$  cm). Almost a fifth could convert metric measures of length, weight, and capacity from one unit level to another (two levels, cm, m, g, kg, ml, l). Almost 60% could convert measures of time from one unit level to another (minutes, hours, days, and weeks), and almost half could read time in five-minute intervals. Just under 40% of pupils succeeded in converting money from one unit level to another (pounds and pence).

Over four-fifths of pupils correctly determined the area of regular shapes by counting squares and under a third could determine the perimeter of simple regular shapes (triangle, square, rectangle).

Geometry and Charts and Graphs. Almost three-quarters identified properties of two-dimensional shapes while less than 40% identified properties of three-dimensional shapes. Almost half the pupils could identify two-dimensional shapes with an axis of symmetry. Almost 60% could read and interpret bar charts.

Problem Solving. Over half the pupils solved addition and subtraction problems applied to length, weight, and capacity; a third solved multiplication problems with whole numbers, and slightly fewer solved division problems with whole numbers. About a third could also solve problems involving unit fractions and addition and subtraction problems with measures of money and time.

The total mean score (number of objectives mastered) for all third grade pupils was 20.48 (SD=7.51; n: 215) (maximum possible score = 41).

#### Drumcondra Criterion-Referenced Mathematics Test - Level 5

Details of objectives measured and percentages of pupils achieving mastery on each are given in Table 75. Figure 6 gives a histogram of the frequency distribution of total objectives mastered on the test.



**Operations With Whole Numbers.** Over 90% of pupils could perform addition and subtraction operations with numbers up to four digits; about four-fifths could multiply two numbers with up to four digits by a number with up to two digits; and 70% could divide a number with up to four digits by a number with up to two digits.

Table 75

**DCRMT Level 5: Statement of Objectives and Percentage of Pupils (n:239)  
Who Mastered Each Objective**

Sections and Objectives	No. of Items	Percentage Achieving Mastery
<b>A. Operations with whole numbers</b>		
1. Add a column of numbers containing not more than four digits.	4	94.1
2. Subtract a number containing not more than four digits from a number containing not more than four digits.	4	90.8
3. Multiply two numbers containing not more than four digits by a number containing not more than two digits.	4	82.8
4. Divide a number containing not more than four digits by a number containing not more than two digits.	4	71.1
<b>B. Whole number structure</b>		
5. Identify the place value of digits in six-digit numerals.	3	46.4
6. Perform number operations in the correct order.	2	72.0
7. Extend additive and multiplicative number sequences.	3	67.4
8. Identify one- and two-digit prime numbers.	3	65.3
9. Find prime and non-prime factors of two-digit numbers.	3	62.8
10. Identify a common factor of two two-digit numbers.	3	76.6

Table 75—Continued

Sections and Objectives	No. of Items	Percentage Achieving Mastery
11. Identify the highest common factor of two two-digit numbers.	3	46.9
12. Identify the least common multiple of two one-or two-digit numbers (not greater than 20).	3	35.6
<b>C1. Fractional number structures</b>		
13. Identify fractions of numbers.	2	41.1
14. Reduce a fraction to its simplest form.	2	28.6
15. State a fraction in a number of equivalent forms.	2	21.8
16. Complete a ratio statement.	2	27.0
17. Sequence fractions in terms of their order of magnitude.	2	27.0
18. Convert an improper number to a mixed number and vice versa.	2	30.6
19. Complete number sentences illustrating the commutative property of addition and multiplication of unit fractions.	2	50.8
20. Complete number sentences illustrating the associative property of addition and multiplication of unit fractions.	2	46.8
<b>C2. Operations with fractions</b>		
21. Add two fractions having the same denominators.	2	82.7
22. Subtract two fractions having the same denominators.	2	83.1
23. Add two fractions having different denominators.	2	41.1
24. Subtract two fractions having different denominators.	2	39.1
25. Multiply two unit fractions having different denominators.	2	36.3

Table 75—Continued

Sections and Objectives	No. of Items	Percentage Achieving Mastery
26. Add three fractions having different denominators.	2	28.2
27. Subtract two fractions from a third, all having different denominators.	2	31.0
28. Add mixed numbers with renaming.	2	35.1
29. Subtract mixed numbers with renaming.	2	5.2
<b>D1. Decimal number structure</b>		
30. Write decimal numbers in expanded form (three places only).	3	66.1
31. Identify the place value of digits in decimal numbers (three places only).	2	46.2
32. Rename decimal fractions (three places only).	2	37.8
33. Convert decimals to fractions and vice versa (two places only).	2	35.1
34. Sequence decimals in their order of magnitude (two places only).	2	74.9
35. Convert decimals and fractions to percentages and vice versa.	3	32.3
<b>D2. Operations with decimals</b>		
36. Add and subtract decimals with renaming (two places only).	2	41.8
37. Multiple or divide decimals by 10 and 100.	2	19.1
38. Multiply or divide a decimal by a decimal (two places only).	2	19.9
<b>E1. Geometry</b>		
39. Demonstrate recognition of basic geometric shapes and angles.	3	56.6

Table 75—Continued

Sections and Objectives	No. of Items	Percentage Achieving Mastery
40. Demonstrate knowledge of basic geometric facts.	2	25.9
41. Determine the perimeter of polygons.	2	48.2
42. Determine the area of rectangles and right-angled triangles.	2	13.5
E2. Charts and graphs		
43. Read and interpret charts and graphs.	4	85.3
E3. Problem solving		
44. Solve problems on the unitary method.	2	20.3
45. Solve problems involving operations with fractions.	2	33.5
46. Solve problems involving operations with measures of length, area, weight, and capacity.	2	12.0
47. Solve problems involving operations with measures of time.	2	38.2
48. Solve problems involving calculation of profit and loss.	2	45.0

Whole Number Structure. Just under half the pupils could identify the place value of digits in six-digit numerals; over 70% performed number operations in the correct order; over 60% extended additive and multiplicative number sequences and a similar percentage correctly identified one- and two-digit prime numbers.

Over three-quarters of pupils could identify a common factor of two two-digit numbers, over 60% could find prime and non-prime factors of two-digit numbers, and

just under half correctly identified the highest common factor of two two-digit numbers. Less than 40% could identify the least common multiple of two one- or two-digit numbers (not greater than 20).

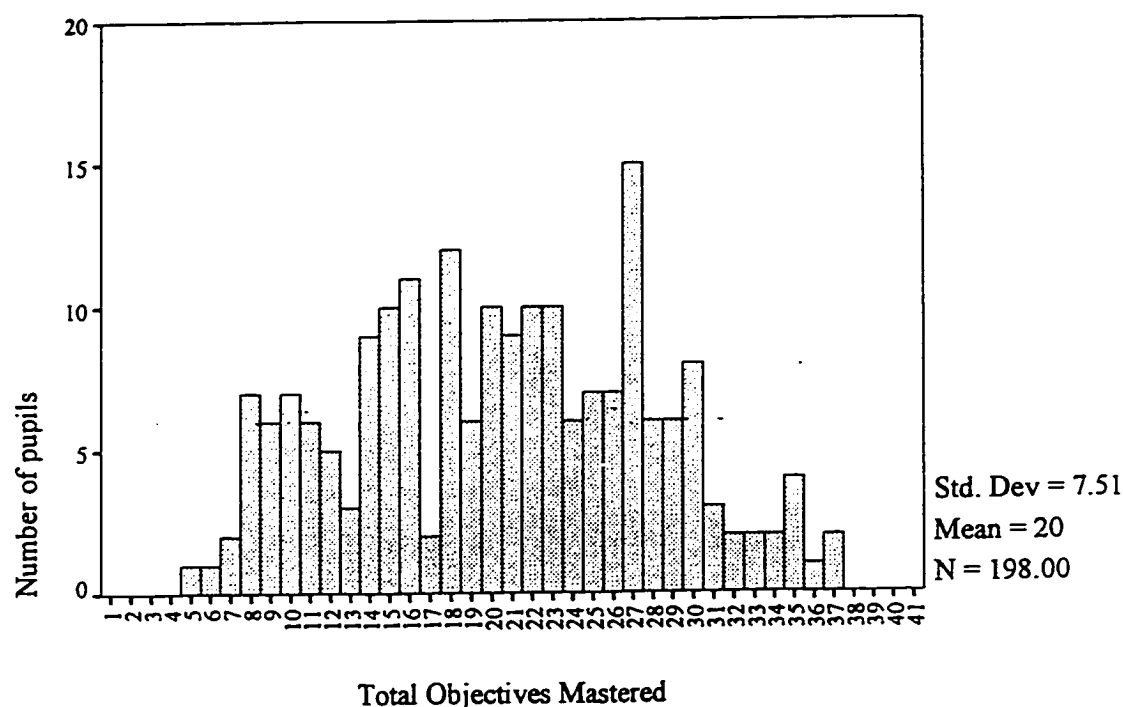


Figure 6. Histogram of Frequency Distribution of Total Objectives Mastered DCRMT, Level 5.

**Fractional Number Structures.** About half the pupils could complete number sentences illustrating the commutative and associative properties of addition and multiplication of unit fractions and 40% could identify fractions of numbers. Other than those tasks, fewer than a third of pupils were successful in completing tasks related to fractional number structure (in order of frequency): converting an improper number to a mixed number and vice versa; reducing a fraction to its simplest form; completing a ratio statement; and sequencing fractions in terms of their order of

magnitude. Only one-fifth of pupils correctly stated fractions in a number of equivalent forms.

**Operations With Fractions.** Pupils were generally more adept at completing operations with fractions than at completing tasks related to fractional number structure (as described above). Over four-fifths could add and subtract two fractions having the same denominator and about 40% could add and subtract two fractions having different denominators and multiply two unit fractions having different denominators. About a third of pupils could add mixed numbers with renaming, subtract two fractions from a third (all having different denominators), and add three fractions having different denominators. Finally, only 5% of pupils could subtract mixed numbers with renaming.

**Decimal Number Structure.** Three-quarters of pupils could sequence decimals in their order of magnitude (two places) and two-thirds could write decimal numbers in expanded form (three places). Over 40% could identify the place value of digits in decimal numbers (three places), while about a third could rename decimal fractions (three places), convert decimals to fractions and vice versa (two places), and convert decimals and fractions to percentages and vice versa.

**Operations With Decimals.** Forty percent of pupils could add and subtract decimals with renaming (two places) and 20% could multiply or divide decimals by 10 and 100 and could multiply or divide a decimal by a decimal (two places).

**Geometry and Charts and Graphs.** Over half the pupils demonstrated recognition of basic geometric shapes, almost half could determine the perimeter of polygons, and about a quarter demonstrated knowledge of basic geometric facts. Fourteen percent of pupils could determine the area of rectangles and right-angled triangles. Eighty-five percent of pupils could read and interpret charts and graphs.

**Problem Solving.** Forty-five percent of pupils could solve problems involving calculation of profit and loss and 40% could solve problems involving operations with measures of time. A third of pupils solved problems involving operations with fractions and a fifth solved problems on the unitary method. Finally, 12% of pupils solved problems involving operations with measures of length, area, weight, and capacity.

The total mean score (number of objectives mastered) for all fifth grade pupils was 22.25 (SD=9.97; n: 239) (maximum possible score = 48).

### **Mathematics Achievement Over Grades**

Using total objectives mastered as the basis for comparison, the overall performance of pupils on the DCRMT tests did not show much variance across grade levels. On average, pupils at grade 1 mastered about 50% of the total objectives on the test; at grade 3, this figure was 49.95%; while at grade 5, pupils, on average, mastered 46.35% of the total test objectives.

**Table 76**  
**Average Percentage Mastery on Sections**  
**of the DCRMT Tests by Grade Level**

Section	Grade 1	Grade 3	Grade 5
Operations with whole numbers	60.26	59.24	84.70
Whole number structure	37.93	57.22	59.13
Measurement	46.60	40.06	-
Geometry	77.10	53.27	36.05
Charts and graphs	27.10	57.10	85.30
Problem solving	65.78	37.16	29.80
Decimals	-	4.50	41.47
- decimal number structure	-	-	(48.73)
- operations with decimals	-	-	(26.93)
Fractions	27.40	41.30	38.55
- fractional number structure	-	-	(34.21)
- operations with fractions	-	-	(42.42)

By examining pupil performance on corresponding sections of tests, clearer patterns emerged. To do this, an average percentage score was calculated for each section of the test (at each level) by summing the total percentage of pupils achieving mastery on each objective and dividing this total by the number of objectives in the section. The resulting average percentage scores for each section are given in Table 76.



From this, it is evident that pupil performance varied by grade level, with levels of performance on some sections (i.e., operations with whole numbers, whole number structure, charts and graphs, and decimals) showing an overall improvement while an overall decrease in performance was evident on the remaining sections of the tests with the exception of the section on fractions for which the higher performance at grade 3 was followed by a slightly lower performance at grade 5.

**Overall Performance Improvement.** The most marked improvement that was evident from this analysis was in the area of charts and graphs for which over four-fifths (85%) of pupils in fifth grade displayed mastery, compared to just over a quarter (27%) of pupils at first grade.

Pupils at all grade levels performed relatively well on the area of operations with whole numbers. Here again the performance of fifth graders (average of 85% showing mastery) was considerably better than that of first graders (average of 60% having mastered objectives in the area).

Pupil performance on the area of whole number structure was also better in the higher grades than in those lower, though the difference was not as marked in this instance and the performance of pupils in grades 3 and 5 was similar.

The area of decimals was not relevant at level 1 of the test. The average performance of pupils at grade 3 (4.5%) was considerably lower than that of pupils at grade 5 (49% for decimal number structure; 27% for operations with decimals; and 42% for the combination of all objectives relating to decimals).

**Overall Performance Decrease.** The largest decrease in performance was in the area of geometry. An average of three-quarters (77%) of pupils in grade 1 mastered objectives related to geometry. This dropped to an average of just over half (53%) the pupils at grade 3, and to just over a third (36%) of pupils at grade 5.

Pupils' performance in the area of problem solving also showed a marked decrease from an average of two-thirds (66%) of first graders showing mastery of the area to just over an average of a third of pupils (37%) at grade 3, and an average of less than a third (30%) at grade 5.

The area of measurement was assessed only at levels 1 and 3 of the tests, and here again the average performance of pupils showed a slight decrease from 47% mastery at grade 1 to 40% at grade 3.

The final area assessed in the mathematics test was fractions. To make this comparison, the calculation was based on the objectives relevant to fractions from the fractions/ decimals section of the level 3 test. At level 5, the two relevant sections (i.e., fractional number structure and operations with fractions) were used as the basis for comparison. Here again, pupil performance at grade 3 (41% mastery) was better than at grade 1 (27% mastery). At grade 5, an average of 34% of pupils mastered objectives in the area of fractional number structure while the average mastery was 42% for operations with fractions. If these two areas are combined, the resulting average percentage mastery for objectives relating to fractions (39%) is slightly lower than that at third grade.

On the basis of this analysis, it is difficult to determine possible explanations for the observed performances of pupils. Further examination of the data should include an examination of the mathematics curriculum for each grade level and an analysis of the difficulty levels of the objectives that were mastered within each section. Such analyses are beyond the scope of this present study.

### **Between-School Differences in Achievement**

#### **Reading**

**Grade 1.** School means on the Appraisal of Early Reading Skills test range from 10.33 (SD=2.48) to 11.41 (SD=2.15) (see Table 77) but differences between means are not significant (Table 78). (For the purposes of analyses in this section, schools are identified by the letters A to F and classes are identified by the numbers 1 to 5. Classes within schools are identified using the combined school and class label, e.g., B1, F4.) Class means on the test range from 10.03 to 11.69 but, again, the means do not differ significantly (Table 79). (For all analyses throughout this dissertation, statistical significance was accepted at the .05 level. The Scheffé multiple ranges test was used in all post hoc analyses, with a significance level set at .05.)

**Grade 3.** While school means on the Drumcondra English Reading Test range from 29.36 (SD=6.93) to 36.76 (SD=9.95) (see Table 80) and the difference

between means is significant ( $F=2.77$ ;  $df=4,228$ ;  $p<.05$ ) (Table 81), no two schools differed significantly from each other at the .05 level in post-hoc analyses. The range for class means is similar, the lowest being 27.19 ( $SD=10.61$ ) and the highest 36.76 ( $SD=9.95$ ) (Table 80). Between-class differences are not significant (Table 82).

Table 77

School and Class Means (and SDs) for  
Appraisal of Early Reading Skills

	M	SD	Valid n
<u>All grade 1</u>	11.06	2.76	365
<u>School A</u> (Class 1)	10.75	2.85	24
<u>School B</u>	10.70	3.24	(66)
School B, Class 1	11.41	3.28	32
School B, Class 2	10.03	3.11	34
<u>School C</u>	11.07	2.44	(119)
School C, Class 1	11.54	2.65	35
School C, Class 2	10.58	2.12	33
<u>School D</u> (Class 1)	10.33	2.48	24
<u>School E</u> (Class 1)	11.41	2.15	27
<u>School F</u>	11.31	2.78	(156)
School F, Class 1	11.69	3.00	32
School F, Class 2	10.78	3.09	32
School F, Class 3	11.43	2.30	30
School F, Class 4	10.63	2.67	32
School F, Class 5	12.10	2.62	30

Table 78

**Analysis of Variance Table for Comparison of School Means  
on Appraisal of Early Reading Skills**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	37.02	5	7.40	.98	.43
Within groups	2726.53	359	7.60		
Total	2763.55	364			

Table 79

**Analysis of Variance Table for Comparison of Class Means  
on Appraisal of Early Reading Skills**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	131.85	11	11.99	1.61	.10
Within groups	2631.70	353	7.45		
Total	2763.55	364			

Grade 5. Total school means range from 27.00 (SD=8.57) to 42.60 (SD=14.07) (Table 83) and the overall F-value is significant (F=6.82; df= 4,261;  $p<.01$ ) (Table 84). In post-hoc analyses, one school mean (27.00) was significantly lower than the means of each of the other four schools ( $p=.05$ ). Class means range from 27.00 (SD=8.57) to 46.23 (SD=16.29) (Table 83); the overall F-value is also

significant ( $F=4.52$ ;  $df=8,257$ ;  $p<.01$ ) (Table 85) with one class in one school being significantly different from two classes in another school ( $p=.05$ ).

Table 80

School and Class Means (and SDs) for Drumcondra  
English Reading Test, Level 2, Form B

	Vocabulary (30 items)		Comprehension (40 items)		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<u>All grade 3</u>	12.63	6.01	18.10	6.02	30.73	11.21
<u>School A</u> (Class 1)	12.14	4.03	17.23	4.45	29.36	6.93
<u>School B</u>	12.07	6.48	17.28	6.01	29.36	11.69
School B, Class 1	12.37	7.32	18.85	6.05	31.22	13.01
School B, Class 2	11.78	6.26	15.41	5.13	27.19	10.61
School B, Class 3	12.07	6.03	17.59	6.48	29.67	11.40
<u>School C</u>	12.28	5.75	18.70	5.89	30.99	10.93
School C, Class 1	12.62	5.60	18.30	6.53	30.92	11.49
School C, Class 2	11.95	5.96	19.11	5.22	31.05	10.50
<u>School D</u> (Class 1)	11.85	6.94	16.96	6.66	28.82	12.97
<u>School E</u> (Class 1)	16.17	4.61	20.59	6.28	36.76	9.95

Note: School F was a junior school and had no third grade

Table 81

**Analysis of Variance Table for Comparison of School Means  
on Drumcondra English Reading Test, Level 2, Form B**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	1351.42	4	337.86	2.77	.03
Within groups	27800.08	228	121.93		
Total	29151.50	232			

Table 82

**Analysis of Variance Table for Comparison of Class Means  
on Drumcondra English Reading Test, Level 2, Form B**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	1575.64	7	225.09	1.84	.08
Within groups	27575.87	225	122.56		
Total	29151.51	232			

### Mathematics

Grade 1. School means range from 17.27 (SD=5.50) to 22.54 (SD=6.51)

(Table 86) and the overall F-value is significant ( $F=7.73$ ;  $df=5,314$ ;  $p<.01$ ) (Table

Table 83

**School and Class Means (and SDs) for Drumcondra English  
Reading Test, Form C, Version D91**

	Vocabulary (40 items)		Comprehension (40 items)		Total (80 items)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<u>All grade 5</u>	15.56	7.59	23.30	7.12	38.85	14.45
<u>School A</u> (Class 1)	10.35	4.43	16.65	5.37	27.00	8.57
<u>School B</u>	14.80	6.91	22.79	7.80	37.59	13.85
School B, Class 1	12.70	5.37	20.26	6.50	32.96	11.09
School B, Class 2	15.15	7.60	24.74	8.00	39.89	14.89
School B, Class 3	16.56	7.23	23.37	8.38	39.93	14.57
<u>School C</u>	17.41	7.69	25.19	7.37	42.60	14.07
School C, Class 1	19.69	8.72	26.54	8.47	46.23	16.29
School C, Class 2	16.97	7.01	24.20	8.00	41.17	14.29
School C (Class 3)	15.41	6.72	24.78	4.96	40.19	10.33
<u>School D</u> (Class 1)	16.06	9.60	22.97	8.82	39.03	17.62
<u>School E</u> (Class 1)	15.09	5.90	24.77	6.50	39.86	10.61

Note: School F was a junior school and had no fifth grade

87). In post-hoc analyses the mean for one school was significantly lower than the means for two other schools ( $p=.05$ ). There is slightly more variation in class means, the lowest being 16.00 ( $SD=5.82$ ) and the highest 23.94 ( $SD=6.01$ ) (see



Table 86). The overall F-value is also significant ( $F=4.45$ ;  $df=11,308$ ;  $p<.01$ ) (Table 88) with three classes from one school being significantly different from one class in another school ( $p=.05$ ).

Table 84

Analysis of Variance Table for Comparison of School Means on  
Drumcondra English Reading Test, Form C, Version D91

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Scheffé ( $p=.05$ )
Between groups	5235.65	4	1308.91	6.82	.00	A≠B,D,E,C
Within groups	50089.64	261	191.91			
Total	55325.29	265				

Grade 3. Total school means range from 16.58 ( $SD=5.60$ ) to 22.30 ( $SD=8.08$ ) (see Table 89). While the overall F-value is significant ( $F=2.50$ ;  $df=4,193$ ;  $p<.05$ ) (Table 90), no two schools differ significantly from each other ( $p=.05$ ). Class means range from 16.65 ( $SD=6.27$ ) to 23.96 ( $SD=6.43$ ); once again the overall F-value is significant ( $F=3.86$ ;  $df=7,190$ ;  $p<.001$ ) (Table 91) but no two classes differ significantly from each other ( $p=.05$ ).

Grade 5. Total school means range from 16.22 ( $SD=6.42$ ) to 28.7 ( $SD=10.02$ ) (see Table 92). The overall F-value is significant ( $F=27.65$ ;  $df=4,224$ ;  $p<.01$ ) (Table

Table 85

**Analysis of Variance Table for Comparison of Class Means on  
Drumcondra English Reading Test, Form C, Version D91**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Scheffé ( $p=.05$ )
Between groups	6822.22	8	852.78	4.52	.00	A≠C2, C1
Within groups	48503.06	257	188.73			
Total	55325.28	265				

93), the two schools with the highest means (schools E and C) being significantly different from the two schools with the lowest means (schools B and A). The school with the highest mean (school C) was also significantly different from the remaining school (school D) ( $p=.05$ ). There was a great deal of variation in class means, ranging from 15.00 ( $SD=5.83$ ) to 35.23 ( $SD=8.22$ ). As would be expected therefore, the overall F-value is significant ( $F=20.26$ ;  $df=8,220$ ;  $p<.01$ ) (Table 94). The class with the highest mean differs significantly from all other classes ( $p=.05$ ). Furthermore, two classes (means of 24.91 and 25.63) differ significantly from the three classes with the lowest means (15.00 to 16.46) and another class ( $M=25.74$ ) differs significantly from the two classes with the lowest means ( $p=.05$ ).

Table 86

## School and Class Means (and SDs) for DCRMT, Level 1

	M	SD	Valid n
<u>All grade 1</u>	9.50	6.35	320
<u>School A</u> (Class 1)	19.33	5.79	18
<u>School B</u>	21.10	6.76	(63)
School B, Class 1	21.54	7.19	28
School B, Class 2	20.74	6.48	35
<u>School C</u>	22.54	6.51	(58)
School C, Class 1	23.94	6.01	31
School C, Class 2	20.93	6.81	27
<u>School D</u> (Class 1)	19.67	4.97	24
<u>School E</u> (Class 1)	20.86	7.01	21
<u>School F</u>	17.27	5.50	(136)
School F, Class 1	19.21	5.58	29
School F, Class 2	18.14	7.22	28
School F, Class 3	16.31	3.53	29
School F, Class 4	16.00	5.82	26
School F, Class 5	16.46	4.12	24

Table 87

**Analysis of Variance Table for Comparison of  
School Means on DCRMT, Level 1**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Scheffé (p=.05)
Between groups	1409.27	5	281.86	7.73	0.00	F≠C,B
Within groups	11448.70	314	36.46			
Total	12857.97	319				

Table 88

**Analysis of Variance Table for Comparison of  
Class Means on DCRMT, Level 1**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Scheffé (p=.05)
Between groups	1764.34	11	160.40	4.45	0.00	F4,F3,F5≠C1
Within groups	11093.63	308	36.02			
Total	12857.97	319				

Table 89

## School and Class Means (and SDs) for DCRMT, Level 3

	M	SD	Valid n
<u>All grade 3</u>	20.48	7.51	198
<u>School A</u> (Class 1)	16.58	5.60	19
<u>School B</u>	19.76	7.26	(72)
School B, Class 1	18.62	7.23	21
School B, Class 2	16.65	6.27	26
School B, Class 3	23.96	6.43	25
<u>School C</u>	22.30	8.08	(66)
School C, Class 1	20.94	7.70	32
School C, Class 2	23.59	8.33	34
<u>School D</u> (Class 1)	20.47	8.01	19
<u>School E</u> (Class 1)	20.68	6.37	22

**Note:** School F was a junior school and had no third grade

Table 90

## Analysis of Variance Table for Comparison of School Means on DCRMT, Level 3

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Scheffé (p=.05)
Between groups	546.31	4	136.58	2.50	.04	none
Within groups	10559.07	193	54.71			
Total	11105.37	197				

Table 91

Analysis of Variance Table for Comparison of Class Means on DCRMT, Level 3

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Scheffé (p=.05)
Between groups	1381.33	7	197.33	3.86	.0006	none
Within groups	9724.05	190	51.18			
Total	11105.37	197				

Table 92

School and Class Means (and SDs) for DCRMT, Level 5

	M	SD	Valid n
<u>All grade 5</u>	22.25	9.97	229
<u>School A</u> (Class 1)	16.46	6.19	24
<u>School B</u>	16.22	6.42	(69)
School B, Class 1	15.00	5.83	24
School B, Class 2	17.81	7.59	21
School B, Class 3	16.04	5.83	24
<u>School C</u>	28.70	10.02	(89)
School C, Class 1	35.23	8.22	31
School C, Class 2	24.91	8.34	34
School C, Class 3	25.63	10.38	24
<u>School D</u> (Class 1)	19.25	8.50	28
<u>School E</u> (Class 1)	25.74	6.30	19

Note: School F was a junior school and had no fifth grade

Table 93

Analysis of Variance Table for Comparison of School Means on DCRMT, Level 5

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Scheffé (p=.05)
Between groups	7497.87	4	1874.47	27.65	.00	B,A≠E,C D≠C
Within groups	15183.44	224	67.78			
Total	22681.31	228				

Table 94

Analysis of Variance Table for Comparison of Class Means on DCRMT, Level 5

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Scheffé (p=.05)
Between groups	9622.44	8	1202.81	20.26	.00	C1≠All E≠B1,B3
Within groups	13058.87	220	59.36			C2,C3≠B1 B3,A
Total	22681.31	228				

Gender Differences in AchievementReading

An examination of gender differences at grade 1 indicates that girls performed better than boys on the Appraisal of Early Reading Skills test ( $F=12.08$ ;  $df=1,363$ ;  $p<.001$ ) (Table 95).

At grade 3, boys' and girls' total raw scores, vocabulary raw scores, and comprehension raw scores on the Drumcondra English Reading Test were compared. Separate analyses of variance did not show any statistically significant difference between boys and girls (see Tables 96, 97, 98).

At grade 5, boys' mean total raw scores on each section (vocabulary and comprehension) of the Drumcondra English Reading Test, version D91 were higher than girls' mean scores, and significant differences were found for each of the comparisons (see Tables 99, 100, 101).

Table 95

**Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Gender Comparisons on the Appraisal of Early Reading Skills**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	89.02	1	89.02	12.08	.0006
Within groups	2674.54	363	7.37		
Total	2763.55	364			
	M	SD		Valid n	
Males	10.67	2.75		222	
Females	11.68	2.66		143	



Table 96

Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Gender Comparisons  
of Total Raw Scores on the Drumcondra English Reading Test, Level 2

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	17.63	1	17.63	.14	.71
Within groups	29133.87	231	126.12		
Total	29151.50	232			
	M	SD		Valid n	
Males	30.93	11.57		155	
Females	30.35	10.52		78	

Table 97

Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Gender Comparisons of  
Vocabulary Raw Scores on the Drumcondra English Reading Test, Level 2

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	1.00	1	1.00	.03	.87
Within groups	8381.26	231	36.28		
Total	8382.26	232			
	M	SD		Valid n	
Males	12.68	6.23		155	
Females	12.54	5.59		78	

Table 98

**Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Gender Comparisons of Comprehension Raw Scores on the Drumcondra English Reading Test, Level 2**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	10.23	1	10.23	.28	.60
Within groups	8395.30	231	36.34		
Total	8405.53	232			
	M		SD		Valid n
Males	18.25		6.08		155
Females	17.81		5.92		78

Table 99

**Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Gender Comparisons of Total Raw Scores on the Drumcondra English Reading Test, Version D91**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	1932.76	1	1932.76	9.56	.0022
Within groups	53392.52	264	202.24		
Total	55325.28	265			
	M		SD		Valid n
Males	40.46		15305		196
Females	34.34		11.55		70

Table 100

**Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Gender Comparisons of Vocabulary Raw Scores on the Drumcondra English Reading Test, Version D91**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	814.35	1	814.35	14.89	.0001
Within groups	14441.30	264	54.70		
Total	15255.65	265			
	M	SD		Valid n	
Males	16.60	7.87		196	
Females	12.63	5.83		70	

Table 101

**Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Gender Comparisons of Comprehension Raw Scores on the Drumcondra English Reading Test, Version D91**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	237.97	1	237.97	3.94	.048
Within groups	15951.57	264	60.42		
Total	16189.54	265			
	M	SD		Valid n	
Males	23.86	8.07		196	
Females	21.71	6.88		70	

### Mathematics

First grade pupils' total scores on the DCRMT Level 1 were compared by gender and no significant differences were found (see Table 102). Neither were gender differences on the DCRMT, Level 3 at grade 3 significant (see Table 103). Gender differences on the DCRMT, Level 5 at grade 5 were found to be significant, with boys outperforming girls ( $F=8.81$ ;  $df=1,227$ ;  $p<.05$ ) (Table 104).

Two-way analyses of variance were carried out to test for gender and school effects and any possible interaction between the two. The results are presented in Tables 105 to 110. With the exception of grade 3 math, all of the main effects are significant but none of the 2-way interaction effects is. Thus, school effects are

Table 102

Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Gender Comparisons of Total Raw Scores on DCRMT, Level 1

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	2.46	1	2.46	.06	.81
Within groups	12855.51	318	40.43		
Total	12857.97	319			
	M	SD		Valid n	
Males	19.58	6.34		197	
Females	19.40	6.38		123	

Table 103

**Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Gender  
Comparisons of Total Raw Scores on DCRMT, Level 3**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	118.27	1	118.27	2.11	.15
Within groups	10987.11	196	56.06		
Total	11105.37	197			
	M	SD		Valid n	
Males	21.02	7.98		133	
Females	19.37	6.34		65	

Table 104

**Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Gender  
Comparisons of Total Raw Scores on DCRMT, Level 5**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	847.08	1	847.08	8.81	.003
Within groups	21834.23	227	96.19		
Total	22681.31	228			
	M	SD		Valid n	
Males	23.43	10.56		167	
Females	19.10	7.40		62	

Table 105

**Two-Way Analysis of Variance Table for Gender by School Comparisons  
on Appraisal of Early Reading Skills**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig of F
<b>Main Effects</b>	121.994	6	20.332	2.753	.013
Gender	84.976	1	84.976	11.508	.001
School	32.980	5	6.596	.893	.486
<b>2-Way Interactions</b>	12.769	2	6.384	.865	.422
Gender x School	12.769	2	6.384	.865	.422
<b>Explained</b>	134.763	8	16.845	2.281	.022
<b>Residual</b>	2628.788	356	7.384		
<b>Total</b>	2763.551	364	7.592		

significant at some grade levels on either reading or math (or both), and gender effects are also significant at some grade levels on either reading or math (or both). However, there is no interaction between school and gender.

#### Relationship Between Pupil Achievements and Mothers' Characteristics

Data from the mothers' interview described in Chapter IX were matched with achievement data (as described in the section above) of their children. The numbers of mothers with children at each grade level are given in Table 111. In this section, the results of analyses of the relationship between pupil achievements and

characteristics of the mothers are described. The characteristics that were examined were: category of involvement (as defined in the previous chapter); mothers' perception of school; accuracy in assessing childrens' scholastic performance; home-related support measures; and school-related support measures.

Table 106

Two-Way Analysis of Variance Table for Gender by School Comparisons  
on Drumcondra English Reading Test, Level 2

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig of F
Main Effects	2092.488	5	418.498	3.519	.004
Gender	741.065	1	741.065	6.232	.013
School	2074.859	4	518.715	4.362	.002
2-Way Interactions	182.876	1	182.876	1.538	.216
Gender x School	182.876	1	182.876	1.538	.216
Explained	2275.364	6	379.227	3.189	.005
Residual	26876.138	226	118.921		
Total	29151.502	232	125.653		

Table 107

Two-Way Analysis of Variance Table for Gender by School Comparisons  
on Drumcondra English Reading Test, Version D91

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig of F
Main Effects	6865.204	5	1373.041	7.349	.000
Gender	1629.560	1	1629.560	8.722	.003
School	4932.444	4	1233.111	6.600	.000
2-Way Interactions	70.798	1	70.798	.379	.539
Gender x School	70.798	1	70.798	.379	.539
Explained	6936.002	6	1156.000	6.187	.000
Residual	48389.280	259	186.831		
Total	55325.282	265	208.775		

Table 108

Two-Way Analysis of Variance Table for Gender by School Comparisons  
on DCRMT, Level 1

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig of F
Main Effects	1520.199	6	253.367	6.953	.000
Gender	110.926	1	110.926	3.044	.082
School	1517.738	5	303.548	8.330	.000
2-Way Interactions	5.260	2	2.630	.072	.930
Gender x School	5.260	2	2.630	.072	.930
Explained	1525.460	8	190.682	5.233	.000
Residual	11332.512	311	36.439		
Total	12857.972	319	40.307		



Table 109

Two-Way Analysis of Variance Table for Gender by School Comparisons  
on DCRMT, Level 3

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig of F
Main Effects	554.972	5	110.994	2.054	.073
Gender	8.665	1	8.665	.160	.689
School	436.707	4	109.177	2.020	.093
2-Way Interactions	226.812	1	226.812	4.196	.042
Gender x School	226.812	1	226.812	4.196	.042
Explained	781.784	6	130.297	2.411	.029
Residual	10323.590	191	54.050		
Total	11105.374	197	56.372		

Achievement Levels of Children of Mothers Categorized  
as Involved and Uninvolved

Analyses were carried out to compare the achievement levels of children of mothers in each of the involvement categories, involved (I), uninvolved-okay (UOK), and uninvolved-needs help (UNH). This study includes data from parents (and their children) who had not been successfully contacted by schools, something which has not been done in previous studies (O'Sullivan & Tennant, 1993).

Table 110

Two-Way Analysis of Variance Table for Gender by School Comparisons  
on DCRMT, Level 5

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig of F
<b>Main Effects</b>	7498.534	5	1499.707	21.932	.00
Gender	.664	1	.664	.010	.922
School	6651.457	4	1662.864	24.318	.00
<b>2-Way Interactions</b>	2.589	1	2.589	.038	.846
Gender x School	2.589	1	2.589	.038	.846
Explained	7501.123	6	1250.187	18.283	.00
Residual	15180.187	222	68.379		
Total	22681.310	228	99.479		

Table 111

Numbers of Mothers With Children at Each Grade Level

Grade	I	UOK	UNH	Total
Junior Infants	52	32	28	112
First	28	51	18	97
Third	16	22	18	56
Fifth	25	33	17	75
Total	121	138	81	340

$\chi^2=16.33$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p=.0121$

### First Grade

Data on reading achievement at first grade level were available for a total of 92 cases. The overall mean score was 10.90 (SD = 2.54). No group differed significantly from any other group (Table 112).

Data on mathematics achievement were available for a total of 76 cases. The overall mean score was 19.76 (SD = 6.27). There were no significant differences between the groups (Table 113).

Table 112

Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Comparisons  
of Reading Scores of First Grade Children  
of I, UOK, and UNH Mothers

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	17.24	2	8.62	1.35	.27
Within groups	568.88	89	6.39		
Total	586.12	91			
	M	SD		Valid n	
I	11.39	2.35		28	
UOK	10.88	2.61		49	
UNH	10.07	2.58		15	

### Third Grade

Data on reading achievement at third grade level were available for 52 cases.

The overall mean score was 31.50 (SD = 12.04) and there were no significant between-group differences (Table 114).

Data on mathematics achievement were available for a total of 46 cases. The overall mean score was 19.87 (SD = 8.10) and no group differed significantly from any other group (Table 115).

Table 113

Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Comparisons of Mathematics Scores of First Grade Children of I, UOK, and UNH Mothers

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	52.68	2	26.34	.67	.52
Within groups	2891.06	73	39.60		
Total	2943.74	75			
	M	SD		Valid n	
I	20.58	6.26		24	
UOK	18.98	5.68		40	
UNH	20.75	8.17		12	

### Fifth Grade

Data on reading achievement at fifth grade level were available for a total of 74 cases and the overall mean score was 41.18 (SD = 16.20). Overall between-group differences were significant ( $F = 3.60$ ;  $df=2, 71$ ;  $p < .05$ ), the reading scores of children of I mothers being significantly higher than children of UNH mothers ( $p < .05$ ) (Table 116).

Table 114

Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Comparisons of Reading Scores of Third Grade Children of I, UOK, and UNH Mothers

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	285.66	2	142.83	.99	.38
Within groups	7107.34	49	145.05		
Total	7393.00	51			
	M	SD		Valid n	
I	35.29	15.95		14	
UOK	29.62	9.15		21	
UNH	30.71	11.52		17	

Table 115

**Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Comparisons  
of Mathematics, Scores of Third Grade Children  
of I, UOK, and UNH Mothers**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
<b>Between groups</b>	188.92	2	94.46	1.47	.24
<b>Within groups</b>	2762.30	43	64.24		
<b>Total</b>	2951.22	45			
	M	SD		Valid n	
I	23.17	8.81		12	
UOK	18.20	6.95		20	
UNH	19.43	8.73		14	

Table 116

**Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Comparisons  
of Reading Scores of Fifth Grade Children  
of I, UOK, and UNH Mothers**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Scheffé (p=.05)
<b>Between groups</b>	1763.91	2	881.96	3.60	.032	UNH≠I
<b>Within groups</b>	17390.80	71	244.94			
<b>Total</b>	19154.72	73				
	Mean	SD			Valid n	
I	47.46	15.15			24	
UOK	40.09	15.63			33	
UNH	34.41	16.39			17	

Data on mathematics achievement at fifth grade level were available for a total of 61 cases. The overall mean score was 24.64 ( $SD = 10.25$ ) and there were no significant between-group differences (Table 117).

### Summary

An examination of the performance of children of mothers in each of the involvement categories on achievement measures of reading and mathematics revealed only one statistically significant difference between the groups. The significant difference was for fifth grade reading achievement, on which children of I mothers performed significantly better than children of UNH mothers. It is possible that a difference was found in reading achievement but not in mathematics because of the nature of the subject matter. This may be due to the fact that the acquisition of mathematical skills and concepts is, by its nature, more school-based than reading. The development of reading skills is closely linked to children's language development experiences, including a vast range of experiences that children have (or don't have) in the context of their home environment.

### Mothers' Perception of School

Responses to eight items in the Mothers' Interview were grouped to form a scale indicating mothers' overall perception of school. The eight items covered mothers' perceptions of access to their child's teacher; feeling of intrusion in the

Table 117

**Analysis of Variance Table and Descriptive Statistics for Comparisons  
of Mathematics Scores of Fifth Grade Children  
of I, UOK, and UNH Mothers**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	4.29	2	2.14	.02	.98
Within groups	6299.78	58	108.62		
Total	6304.07	60			
	M	SD		Valid n	
I	24.95	10.20		21	
UOK	24.59	10.93		27	
UNH	24.23	9.65		13	

school; confidence that speaking to child's teacher helps child do better at school; perceived welcome from teacher; level of teacher interest in parent opinion of child's education; teacher antagonism towards parents; teacher concern about family needs and problems; and teacher interest in every child in the class.

Mothers' responses to the items were coded on a scale from 1 to 5 with a score of 5 indicating a positive perception of school and a score of 1 indicating a negative perception. An intermediate value of 3 was assigned to "Don't know" responses. The reliability coefficient (alpha) for the scale, comprising all eight items, was 0.69.



Mothers' overall perceptions of school were very positive with a mean scale score of 4.59 (SD = 0.47; n=340). There are no significant between-group differences for I, UOK, and UNH groups of mothers (Table 118).

Further analyses examined mothers' responses across each grade level. The mean scale score for mothers of children in first grade was highest (M = 4.67; SD = .41; n=97) while mean scale scores for mothers of children in third and fifth grades were slightly lower (M = 4.45; SD = .55; n=56 and M = 4.49; SD = .50; n=75 respectively). Mothers of children in first grade had a significantly more positive perception of school than mothers of children in third grade (see Table 119).

Table 118

Analysis of Variance Table for Comparisons of Perceptions of School of I, UOK, and UNH Mothers

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	.15	2	.07	.34	.71
Within groups	73.22	337	.22		
Total	73.36	339			

The responses of I, UOK, and UNH mothers to each item on the perception to school scale were compared (see Table 120). Group responses differ significantly for only one item, which is the one relating to feeling of intrusion on visiting the school.

Table 119

**Analysis of Variance Table for Comparisons of Mothers'  
Perceptions of School by Grade Level**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	Diff (p=.05)
Between groups	2.75	2	1.37	5.85	.003	3 ≠ 1
Within groups	55.14	235	.24			
Total	57.89	237				

Not surprisingly, the mean score of UNH mothers on this item was significantly lower than that of I mothers (Table 120). In general, therefore, it would seem that all groups of mothers had similar perceptions of school.

Responses of I, UOK, and UNH mothers to each item on the perception to school scale were also examined by grade level. Mothers of children in first grade were more positive about feeling welcomed by the child's teacher ( $M = 4.92$ ) than they were about any other aspect of schooling, while mothers of children in third grade and mothers of those in fifth grade were more positive about access to the child's class teacher ( $M = 4.94$  and  $M = 4.94$  respectively). Mothers of children at each grade level were all least positive about level of teacher concern about family needs and problems (first:  $M = 4.03$ ; third:  $M = 3.73$ ; fifth:  $M = 3.96$ ). None of the group means differ significantly by grade level (see Table 121).

When mothers' scores on the perception of school scale was correlated with pupils' scores in mathematics and reading at each of the three grade levels, none of the

Table 120

**ANOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for Responses to Items Comprising  
Perception of School Scale of I, UOK, and UNH Mothers**

		M	SD	N	F	df	p	Diff (p=.05)
Access to teacher	I	4.93	.52	121	1.19	2,337	.31	
	UOK	4.96	.21	138				
	UNH	4.86	.54	81				
Feeling of intrusion	I	4.68	.73	121	5.20	2,337	.006	UNH≠I
	UOK	4.35	1.23	138				
	UNH	4.19	1.40	81				
Confidence in speaking to teacher	I	4.55	.87	121	1.02	2,337	.36	
	UOK	4.63	.82	138				
	UNH	4.72	.62	81				
Welcome from teacher	I	4.78	.51	1211	.92	2,337	.40	
	UOK	4.86	.43	3881				
	UNH	4.80	.49					
Teacher interest in parent opinion	IUOK	4.75	.62	1211	.33	2,337	.72	
	UNH	4.68	.80	3881				
		4.69	.77					
Teacher antagonism towards parents	I	4.79	.61	1211	1.03	2,336	.36	
	UOK	4.66	.89	37				
	UNH	4.64	.89	81				
Teacher concern about family needs and problems	I	3.97	1.34	1211	.97	2,335	.38	
	UOK	3.98	1.30	3780				
	UNH	4.20	1.12					
Teacher interest in individual pupils	IUOK	4.49	.94	1211	1.11	2,336	.33	
	UNH	4.53	.91	3781				
		4.33	1.11					

correlation coefficients is significant, indicating that there is no relationship between this measure of mothers' perception of school and pupils' reading and mathematics achievements at any grade level.

### Mothers' Accuracy in Assessing Children's Scholastic Performance

Mothers were asked to rate their child's overall performance at school as compared to the class group on a scale from 1 "Not as good as most" to 5 "The very best in the class." An intermediate value of 3 was assigned to "Don't know" responses. Using the same scale, ratings of perceptions of children's performance in reading and in mathematics were also obtained. The intercorrelations between these ratings are significant and range from .62 at grade 1 to .49 at grade 5 ( $p < .01$ ) (see Tables 125 - 127).

Most mothers rated their child's performance as average or above, with only small percentages of mothers assigning a rating of "not as good as most" (see Tables 122, 123, and 124). Overestimation of performance is a common finding in studies of parents' predictions of their child's academic performance (Miller, 1988).

Mothers' perceptions of their children's performance in both subjects, and in relation to others in their class were correlated with the children's test scores in reading and mathematics at each grade level (see Tables 125, 126, and 127).

The correlations between perceived and actual performance in reading were significant at all grade levels, and increased in magnitude from .32 at grade one to .53

Table 121

**Analysis of Variance Results for Responses of I, UOK, and UNH Mothers  
to Items Comprising Perception of School Scale by Grade Level**

	Grade	F	df	p
Access to teacher	1	1.13	2,94	.33
	3	1.26	2,53	.29
	5	.49	2,72	.61
Feeling of intrusion	1	2.66	2,94	.08
	3	1.61	2,53	.21
	5	1.48	2,72	.24
Confidence in speaking to teacher	1	.07	2,94	.93
	3	1.24	2,53	.30
	5	.51	2,72	.60
Welcome from teacher	1	1.59	2,94	.21
	3	.69	2,53	.51
	5	.34	2,72	.72
Teacher interest in parent opinion	1	1.74	2,94	.18
	3	.20	2,53	.82
	5	.13	2,72	.88
Teacher antagonism towards parents	1	.34	2,93	.72
	3	1.46	2,53	.24
	5	.20	2,72	.82
Teacher concern about family needs/ problems	1	.66	2,93	.52
	3	.25	2,53	.78
	5	.92	2,71	.40
Teacher interest in individual pupils	1	1.25	2,94	.29
	3	.81	2,52	.45
	5	.47	2,72	.63

Table 122

**Percentage of Mothers Who Rated Their Perceptions of Their Child's  
Performance in Math, by Grade Level**

	Not as good as most	About average	Don't know	Better than most	Best in class
Grade 1	10.1	43.4	4.0	31.3	11.1
Grade 3	14.5	40.3	0.0	41.9	3.2
Grade 5	18.2	40.3	1.3	35.1	5.2

Table 123

**Percentage of Mothers Who Rated Their Perceptions of Their Child's  
Performance in Reading, by Grade Level**

	Not as good as most	About average	Don't know	Better than most	Best in class
Grade 1	4.0	49.5	3.0	34.3	9.1
Grade 3	1.6	58.1	0.0	33.9	6.5
Grade 5	3.9	43.4	2.6	46.1	3.9

at grade 5. The correlation between perceived and actual mathematics achievement at grade 1 was not significant, while correlations at grades 3 and 5 were significant, though slightly lower (.41;  $p=.003$  and .44;  $p=.00$  respectively) than those for reading. This would seem to suggest that mothers were more accurate in assessing their

children's performance in reading than in mathematics, and were more accurate at assessing older than younger children's mathematics performance.

In a study of parents' accuracy in judging the age at which their children would exhibit basic cognitive abilities (as demonstrated on items based on Piagetian concepts), Miller, White, & Delgado (1980) found that (even with a liberal scoring criterion of accepting answers within plus or minus one-third of the target age as being correct) parents were accurate in only 50% of their assessments.

In a further study by Miller (1986), parents made item-by-item predictions of how their own first graders would perform on Piagetian concepts and IQ test batteries. Accuracy was greater on the IQ battery (79% correct predictions) than on the Piagetian items (63% correct predictions).

Since the overall estimates of children's performance that were required for the present study were less stringent than either of the criteria of accuracy described in the studies above, the correlations are lower than would be expected. This is most likely attributable to the limited variance in responses (as described earlier).

At grades 1 and 5, there is also a positive and significant relationship between mothers' ratings of children's performance compared to others and the children's math scores (grade 1 = .47;  $p=.00$  and grade 5 = .36;  $p=.003$ ) and reading scores (grade 1 = .41;  $p=.00$  and grade 5 = .50;  $p=.00$ ). No such relationship was found at grade 3.

Table 124

**Percentage of Mothers Who Rated Their Perceptions of Their Child's  
Performance Relative to Classmates, by Grade Level**

	Not as good as most	About average	Don't know	Better than most	Best in class
Grade 1	5.1	43.4	3.0	42.4	6.1
Grade 3	11.3	45.2	6.5	35.5	1.6
Grade 5	10.4	44.2	1.3	41.6	2.6

Table 125

**Intercorrelation Matrix of Mothers' Perceptions of Children's Scholastic  
Performance and Children's Reading and Mathematics Scores: Grade 1**

	Math scores	Reading scores	Perceived performance in reading	Perceived performance in math
Reading scores	.54 n: 316 p=.00	-	-	-
Perceived performance in reading	.46 n: 75 p=.00	.32 n: 91 p=.002	-	-
Perceived performance in math	.20 n: 74 p=.008	.19 n:90 p=.07	.62 n: 95 p=.00	-
Perceived performance compared to others	.47 n: 75 p=.00	.41 n: 91 p=.00	.66 n: 95 p=.00	.58 n: 94 p=.00



Table 126

**Intercorrelation Matrix of Mothers' Perceptions of Children's  
Scholastic Performance and Children's Reading  
and Mathematics Scores: Grade 3**

	Math scores	Reading scores	Perceived performance in reading	Perceived performance in math
Reading scores	.63 n: 194 p=.00	-	-	-
Perceived performance in reading	.38 n: 51 p=.006	.45 n: 58 p=.00	-	-
Perceived performance in math	.41 n: 51 p=.003	.24 n: 58 p=.07	.42 n: 62 p=.001	-
Perceived performance compared to others	.23 n: 48 p=.12	.22 n: 54 p=.11	.65 n: 58 p=.00	.61 n: 58 p=.00

In a national study of reading in Ireland (Ireland: Department of Education, in preparation), parents of fifth grade pupils were asked to indicate whether their child was among the top, middle, or bottom third of pupils in their class group with 1 = "Top third," 2 = "Middle third," and 3 = "Bottom third." The correlations between this measure of parents' perceptions of their children's performance and the children's scores on three measures of reading (narrative, expository, and documents) were

lower than those found in this present study: -.26; -.27; and -.27 respectively. (The correlations are negative due to the coding of the item on perceived performance.)

Table 127

**Intercorrelation Matrix of Mothers' Perceptions of Children's  
Scholastic Performance and Children's Mathematics  
and Reading Scores: Grade 5**

	Math scores	Reading scores	Perceived performance in reading	Perceived performance in math
Reading scores	.63 n: 222 p=.00	-	-	-
Perceived performance in reading	.31 n: 62 p=.014	.53 n: 72 p=.00	-	-
Perceived performance in math	.44 n: 63 p=.00	.46 n: 74 p=.00	.49 n: 74 p=.00	-
Perceived performance compared to others	.36 n: 63 p=.003	.50 n: 74 p=.00	.67 n: 74 p=.00	.58 n: 76 p=.00

**Relationships Between Home-Related Support Measures  
and Children's Achievements**

Items from the mothers' interview (described in Chapter IX) were grouped to form measures of home-related and school-related support for children. The measures included status variables, supportive home environment variables, measures of

independence training, and measures of mothers' educational, occupational, and performance aspirations and expectations for their children. The relationships between each of these measures and children's achievements in mathematics and reading are examined and discussed in this section.

Much of the research on the relationships between the types of variables described above has concentrated on comparisons between low-income or poverty households in which adults have low educational and occupational levels and more wealthy households in which adults are better educated and employed in higher paying semi-skilled or skilled/professional occupations. The present study is of interest since it examines the relationships between these variables within families from similar socio-economic backgrounds.

### Status Variables

The first group of variables was made up of what would traditionally be regarded as measures of socioeconomic status (SES). These types of "gross" measures to describe homes were used in early research in the area (Kellaghan, 1994) which was reviewed in Chapter II.

Eight items were included as follows: family size; one- or two-adult household; employment status of mother (and partner) (1=unemployed; 2=employed); educational level of mother (and partner) (1=primary school; 2=junior cycle post-primary, no exam; 3=Junior Certificate exam; 4=Leaving Certificate exam; 5=further

education); and occupation of mother (and partner). Open-ended responses were recorded for each of the occupational items and coding of the responses was completed in accordance with the groupings used in the Census of Population (Investment in Education, 1965; Kellaghan, 1988): 6=Higher and lower professional, employers and managers, and salaried employees; 5=Intermediate non-manual; 4=Other non-manual; 3=Skilled manual; 2=Semi-skilled manual, unskilled manual, agricultural laborers; and 1=Unemployed, in prison.

No measure of family income was included. Given that all of the mothers and children in the samples were living in the catchment areas of schools designated (on the criteria described in Chapter III) as disadvantaged, one would not expect much variance on a measure of family income.

Each of these items was correlated with children's achievements in mathematics and reading in grades 1, 3, and 5 (Table 128). Only a small number of the correlation coefficients is significant and the magnitude of the relationship is small.

Family size is inversely related to reading achievement at grade 5 only ( $r=-.24$ ;  $p=.04$ ;  $n=75$ ) with children from larger families performing less well than others.

At grade 3, household composition (i.e., one- or two-adult household) was related to both math ( $r=.36$ ;  $p=.01$ ;  $n=51$ ) and reading ( $r=.27$ ;  $p=.04$ ;  $n=58$ ) achievement with children from two-adult households tending to perform better than others on both measures.

Table 128

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Status Variables  
and Math and Reading Achievements, by Grade Level**

	Grade	Math scores	Reading scores
Family size	1	-.11	-.13
	2	-.11	-.12
	3	-.18	-.24*
Household composition	1	.11	.16
	3	.36**	.27*
	5	-.03	-.09
Employment status (mother)	1	.11	.02
	3	.00	.09
	5	.05	.22
Employment status (partner)	1	.11	.11
	3	.27	.30*
	5	.24	.27
Occupation (mother)	1	.04	.10
	3	.27	.20
	5	.14	.07
Occupation (partner)	1	.23	.05
	3	.07	.29*
	5	-.23	.05
Educational level (mother)	1	.06	-.03
	3	.22	.16
	5	-.07	.18
Educational level (partner)	1	.21	.22*
	3	.11	.04
	5	-.05	.16

\*p≤.05

\*\*p≤.01

Employment status of the mother's partner was significantly related to reading achievement at grades 3 ( $r=.30$ ;  $p=.04$ ;  $n=47$ ) and 5 ( $r=.27$ ;  $p=.03$ ;  $n=63$ ) but the relationship with math achievement was not significant.

Partner's occupation was also moderately related to reading achievement at grade 3 ( $r=.29$ ;  $p=.05$ ;  $n=47$ ).

At grade 1, the educational level of mother's partner was significantly, though moderately, related to reading scores ( $r=.22$ ;  $p=.05$ ;  $n=79$ ).

In general, there were positive relationships between some of the status variables and children's achievements in mathematics and reading but the magnitude of these relationships was moderate. The relationships with reading were more consistent than those with math. These findings, however, are not as conclusive as the findings of previous research in the area (White, 1982; Kellaghan, 1994). It is possible that the relationships between status variables and achievement measures are less consistent within a disadvantaged sample, perhaps because of restriction of variance on some of the measures (e.g., educational level, occupational level).

### Supportive Home Environment

A second group of 22 variables covered aspects of a supportive home environment and included the following items: whether or not mother discussed school report with child and/or partner (1=no; 2=yes); whether or not partner discussed school report with child (1=no; 2=yes); time spent at homework (no. of

hours); help given with homework (1=no; 2=yes) and amount of time spent helping with homework (1=10 minutes or less; 2=10 minutes to half an hour; 3=half to one hour; 4=more than an hour); frequency with which mother discussed school, examined school work, listened to child reading, or listened to reading when child was younger, read to child, read to child when child was younger (all coded 1=never; 2= less than once a month; 3=once or twice a month; 4=once a week; 5=more than once a week; 6=every day); whether or not mother (or partner) read newspapers/books (1=no; 2=yes); mothers' perception of her own ability to help child (1=not at all; 2=very little; 3=don't know; 4=a fair amount; 5=a lot); belief that education is the sole responsibility of the school (1=agree a lot; 2=agree a bit; 3=don't know; 4=disagree a bit; 5=disagree a lot); view that mother should get credit for child's good school performance (1=disagree a lot; 2=disagree a bit; 3=don't know; 4=agree a bit; 5=agree a lot); belief that teachers should discuss child more with mother (1=disagree a lot; 2=disagree a bit; 3=don't know; 4=agree a bit; 5=agree a lot); whether or not mother or partner discussed reading or television viewing with child (1=no; 2=yes) and frequency with which this occurred (1=less than once a month; 2=once/twice a month; 3=once a week; 4=a few times a week; 5=every day); and whether or not mother or partner checked child's reading or television viewing material (1=no; 2=yes) and amount of material checked (1=a little; 2=some; 3=most; 4=all).

Table 129

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Supportive Home  
Environment Variables and Mathematics and Reading Scores: Grade 1**

	Math scores	Reading scores
Discuss school report with child	.09	.15
Discuss school report with partner	-.08	-.07
Partner discuss school report with child	-.09	-.15
Time spent at homework	-.13	-.12
Help given with homework	-.13	-.12
Time spent helping with homework	-.41**	-.31**
Discuss school with child	.11	.03
Examine school work	.13	.13
Listen to reading	-.02	.03
Read to child	-.06	-.05
Read to child when younger	.10	.10
Listen to reading when younger	.12	.12
Read newspapers/books	.17	.09
Partner read newspapers/books	.20	.11
Ability to help child	.10	.16
Leave teaching to teacher	.00	.11
Credit for child's success	-.09	-.15
Teachers should ask parents' opinion	.20	.15
Discuss reading/TV	.23*	.21*
Frequency discuss reading/TV	.05	-.06
Monitor reading/TV	.08	.05
Amount of reading/TV monitored	-.02	-.16

\*p&lt;.05

\*\*p&lt;.01



Table 130

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Supportive Home  
Environment Variables and Mathematics and Reading Scores: Grade 3**

	Math scores	Reading scores
Discuss school report with child	.06	-.05
Discuss school report with partner	.31*	.06
Partner discuss school report with child	-.07	-.03
Time spent at homework	.31	-.09
Help given with homework	-.15	-.23
Time spent helping with homework	-.07	-.08
Discuss school with child	.03	.02
Examine school work	.16	.03
Listen to reading	-.02	-.23
Read to child	-.23	-.14
Read to child when younger	.06	.05
Listen to reading when younger	.03	-.03
Read newspapers/books	.10	-.00
Partner read newspapers/books	-.02	-.26
Ability to help child	.03	-.03
Leave teaching to teacher	-.19	-.12
Credit for child's success	.01	.12
Teachers should ask parents' opinion	-.35*	-.23
Discuss reading/TV	.11	.05
Frequency discuss reading/TV	.02	-.06
Monitor reading/TV	.12	.06
Amount of reading/TV monitored	-.00	-.06

\*p<.05

Table 131

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Supportive Home  
Environment Variables and Mathematics and Reading Scores: Grade 5**

	Math scores	Reading scores
Discuss school report with child	.03	.06
Discuss school report with partner	.05	.14
Partner discuss school report with child	.06	.19
Time spent at homework	-.02	-.21
Help given with homework	-.19	-.18
Time spent helping with homework	-.10	-.11
Discuss school with child	.05	.12
Examine school work	-.13	-.00
Listen to reading	.03	.03
Read to child	.04	.08
Read to child when younger	.33**	.35**
Listen to reading when younger	.13	.27*
Read newspapers/books	.05	.03
Partner read newspapers/books	-.02	.12
Ability to help child	.05	.14
Leave teaching to teacher	-.02	-.17
Credit for child's success	-.01	.05
Teachers should ask parents' opinion	-.15	-.32**
Discuss reading/TV	.21	.14
Frequency discuss reading/TV	-.16	.07
Monitor reading/TV	.15	.19
Amount of reading/TV monitored	-.16	-.01

\*p&lt;.05

\*\*p&lt;.01

None of the supportive home environment variables is significantly related to reading achievement at grade 3 (Table 130). Whether or not mothers discussed the child's school report with their partner is significantly related to the child's achievement in math ( $r=.31$ ;  $p=.05$ ), though the magnitude of the relationship is small.

The other variable that was related to math achievement was mothers' views about whether or not teachers should more frequently request their opinion about their child. Mothers of children in grade 3 were divided in their views, with 48% disagreeing that they should be asked more about their child and 50% agreeing that this should be the case (2% were undecided). The correlation ( $r=-.35$ ;  $p=.01$ ) might be interpreted to mean that children of mothers who disagree that they should have more input tend to do slightly better at math. A possible explanation is that these mothers already have a reasonable amount of discussion with the teacher or that they do not feel the need for such discussion as the child's progress is satisfactory.

At grade 5, only one of the supportive home environment variables is related to math achievement, while three variables are related to reading achievement (Table 131). The frequency with which mothers reported having read to the child when the child was younger is positively and significantly related to both math and reading achievement ( $r=.33$ ;  $p=.01$  and  $r=.35$ ;  $p=.00$  respectively). The correlation between reported frequency of listening to the child's reading when the child was younger and reading achievement is .27 ( $p=.02$ ). As in the case of mathematics at grade 3, mothers'

views about the necessity for teachers to request their opinion about their child is inversely related to reading achievement at grade 5 ( $r = -.32$ ;  $p = .01$ ).

The supportive home environment variables were combined to form a scale of home support. Because the response options varied across the items, the variables were first standardized (converted to z scores). The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the full version of the scale was moderate ( $\alpha = .61$ ).

Using an iterative process of item deletion (i.e., alpha was calculated, the item contributing least to the internal consistency of the scale was deleted, alpha was calculated again, and so on), the reliability coefficient of the supportive home environment scale comprising 10 items was increased to .74 (Table 132).

The home support scale constructed in this way is not significantly related to either math or reading achievement at any grade level (Table 133).

There are several possible explanations for this finding. One possibility is that respondents gave what they felt was a socially desirable response (Edwards, 1957 cited in Cronbach, 1962; Markus & Zajonc, 1985). This is a limitation associated with all survey research and may be more pronounced in an interview situation (as was the case for this study) when the respondent is face to face with an interviewer.

It is also possible, however, that mothers' responses reflected their perceptions of what they did in the home but that these perceptions were not congruent with their actual behaviors (Johnson, 1970). A related issue is that parental interactions with children have been found to reveal inconsistencies in parental behaviors (Sigel, 1982).

A third explanation may be that a restriction of the ranges on each of the measures used, with the resultant limited variances, resulted in low correlations between the measures.

Table 132

## Items Comprising the Supportive Home Environment Scale

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Discuss school report with partner
Partner discuss school report with child
Time spent helping with homework
Discuss school with child
Examine school work
Listen to reading
Read to child
Ability to help child
Frequency discuss reading/TV
Amount of reading/TV monitored
Reliability coefficient (alpha)=.7358

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Another possibility is that, while similar measures of home environment have been found to be good indices in middle-class homes (Davé, 1963; Wolf, 1964; Greaney & Hegarty, 1987; Lareau, 1987; Henderson, 1987), this may not be true in disadvantaged homes. It may be that relatively superfluous activities such as discussing a school report or monitoring reading or television material do not compensate for the more extreme hardships encountered in homes.

Table 133

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Supportive Home Environment Scale (10 Items) and Math and Reading Achievements**

		Math	Reading
Supportive home environment scale	Grade 1	-.06	-.08
		n:78	n:94
		p=.63	p=.46
	Grade 3	-.02	-.12
		n:51	n:58
		p=.92	p=.39
	Grade 5	-.08	-.08
		n:63	n:75
		p=.55	p=.53

### Independence

A series of ten items measuring the degree to which mothers encouraged and fostered independence in their child was identified. Mothers indicated the age (from 4 to 16 years) at which they would allow or expect the child to do each of the following: put self to bed; play in local area; visit friends' homes; stay home alone at night; make choice for self; babysit in another home; stay overnight at friends' home; go to movie with friend; go on overnight school trip; and earn/spend own money. Responses were scored on a scale from 1 "4 years" to 13 "16 years."

Each of the independence items was correlated with children's mathematics and reading achievements at grades 1, 3, and 5 (see Tables 134, 135, and 136).

At grades 1 and 5, none of the variables is significantly related to either math or reading achievements. At grade 3, one of the independence variables is significantly and inversely related to both math and reading and two others are significantly and inversely related to reading (see Table 135). The age at which a mother would allow her child to play in the local area is inversely related to reading achievement ( $r = -.29$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Age at which a child would be allowed to visit friends' homes is inversely related to both math ( $r = -.29$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and reading ( $r = -.34$ ;  $p < .01$ ). The age at which a child would be allowed to stay home alone at night is also inversely related to reading ( $r = -.34$ ;  $p < .05$ ).

These results indicate that, the younger an age at which a child would be allowed to do some of the activities listed above, the better their score on the relevant achievement test. However, the patterns of relationships were disappointing in the context of the findings of previous studies. Parents of high-need achieving children were found to stress independence training and to expect their child to be self reliant at an earlier age than parents of low-need achievers (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953; Winterbottom, 1958; cited in D. R. Shaffer, 1985).

An independence scale was constructed using the above items. When the item on earning/spending money, which did not contribute to the internal consistency of the scale, was removed, the reliability (alpha) of the scale for the remaining nine items was .71. The scale was then correlated with the math and reading scores of pupils at

grades 1, 3, and 5 (Table 137). The independence scale was not significantly related to either math or reading at any grade level.

Table 134

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Independence Variables and Mathematics and Reading Scores: Grade 1**

	Math scores	Reading scores
Put self to bed	-.09	.10
Play in local area	-.18	-.01
Visit friends' homes	-.02	.01
Stay home alone at night	-.07	.05
Make choice for self	-.15	.10
Babysit in another home	-.04	-.02
Stay overnight at friend's home	.10	-.09
Go to movie with friend	.12	-.05
Go on overnight school trip	.14	.03
Earn/spend own money	.08	.06

\*p<.05

\*\*p<.01

**Mothers' Educational, Occupational, and Performance Aspirations and Expectations**

Seven items relating to educational, occupational, and performance aspirations and expectations were also correlated with pupils' achievements in mathematics and reading in grades 1, 3, and 5. The items were as follows: kind of job you would like for child; kind of job you expect child to have importance of education in child's life



(1=not important at all; 2=not very important; 3=don't know; 4=fairly important; 5=very important); how far would you like child to go in school; how far you expect child to go in school (1=sixth grade, primary; 2=one or two years post-primary, no exam; 3=Junior Certificate exam; 4=Leaving Certificate exam; 5=college); how well you would like child to do at school; and how well you expect child to do at school (1=not as well as most; 2=about average; 3=better than most; 4=the very best in the class).

Table 135

Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Independence Variables and Mathematics and Reading Scores: Grade 3

	Math scores	Reading scores
Put self to bed	-.01	-.04
Play in local area	-.06	-.29*
Visit friends' homes	-.29*	-.34**
Stay home alone at night	-.19	-.34**
Make choice for self	-.09	-.19
Babysit in another home	.09	-.04
Stay overnight at friend's home	-.22	-.13
Go to movie with friend	-.20	-.13
Go on overnight school trip	-.17	-.06
Earn/spend own money	-.02	.21

\*p<.05

\*\*p<.01

Table 136

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Independence  
Variables and Mathematics and Reading Scores: Grade 5**

	Math scores	Reading scores
Put self to bed	-.01	.12
Play in local area	.09	.18
Visit friends' homes	-.10	.04
Stay home alone at night	-.16	-.05
Make choice for self	.05	.19
Babysit in another home	.08	.06
Stay overnight at friend's home	-.02	.04
Go to movie with friend	-.03	.10
Go on overnight school trip	-.16	-.21
Earn/spend own money	-.06	.20

\*p&lt;.05

\*\*p&lt;.01

**Importance of Education.** Mothers were also asked to rate the importance of education to their child. At grade 1, all mothers viewed education as being either “very important” (97%) or “fairly important” (3%) for their child. Not surprisingly, given the lack of variance in mothers' responses, relationships between the responses and children's achievement scores at grade 1 were negligible. The pattern is similar at grade 3. Almost all mothers felt that education was either “very important” (88.7%) or “fairly important” (9.7%) in their child's life, with only a minority (1.6%) expressing the view that education was “not very important.” Again, there is no relationship

Table 137

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Independence Scale (9 items) and Math and Reading Achievements**

		Math	Reading
Independence scale	Grade 1	-.04	.03
		n:78	n:94
		p=.75	p=.80
	Grade 3	-.21	-.23
		n:51	n:58
		p=.15	p=.08
	Grade 5	-.03	.15
		n:63	n:75
		p=.82	p=.20

between this variable and children's achievements at grade 3. Mothers of children in grade 5 were also positive about the role of education for their child with 85% rating it as "very important," and 13% rating it as "fairly important". Again, only a minority (1%) felt that education was "not very important" in their child's life. Mothers' perceptions of the importance of education to their child is not related to math achievement at grade 5 and the correlation with reading achievement are small ( $r=.27$ ;  $n:74$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

**Occupational Aspirations.** Mothers had very high occupational aspirations for their children, a vast majority hoping that their child would get a job in the category of either higher/lower professional, employers, managers, salaried employees (37%) or

intermediate non-manual (34%) socio-economic groups. There is no relationship between occupational aspirations and achievement in either math or reading at grades 1 and 3 (Table 138). At grade 5, no relationship was found to exist between occupational aspirations and math achievement, but there is a positive relationship with reading achievement ( $r=.35$ ;  $n:64$ ;  $p<.01$ ), with children for whom mothers had higher occupational aspirations performing better than others.

**Occupational Expectations.** Mothers' occupational expectations for their children were similar to their occupational aspirations. Twenty-six percent of mothers expected their child to get a job in the higher/lower professional category, while 36% expected their child to belong to the intermediate non-manual socio-economic group. At grade 1, occupational expectations are significantly related to both math ( $r=.40$ ;  $n:62$ ;  $p<.01$ ) and reading ( $r=.33$ ;  $n:75$ ;  $p<.01$ ) achievements (Table 138). Neither of the relationships between the variables is significant at grade 3. At grade 5, math achievement is not related to mothers' occupational expectations and the magnitude of the relationship with reading achievement ( $r=.29$ ;  $n:63$ ;  $p<.05$ ) is smaller, but significant, than at first grade.

**Educational Aspirations.** Mothers also held high educational aspirations for their children with 59% expressing a desire that their child would attend a third-level college and 40% hoping that the child would complete second-level education and the Leaving Certificate Examination. At grade 1, 63% of mothers hoped their child would

Table 138

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Mother's Occupational Aspirations and Expectations and Their Children's Math and Reading Achievements at Grades 1, 3, and 5**

		Occupational aspirations	Occupational expectations
Grade 1	Math	.21 n:59 p=.11	.40 n:62 p=.002
	Reading	.19 n:74 p=.10	.33 n:75 p=.004
Grade 3	Math	.12 n:42 p=.45	.11 n:38 p=.52
	Reading	.03 n:49 p=.83	.05 n:43 p=.75
Grade 5	Math	.13 n:52 p=.35	.24 n:53 p=.09
	Reading	.35 n:64 p=.005	.29 n:63 p=.022

attend third level, 35% that their child would complete their second-level education, and 2% that their child would complete the Junior Certificate Examination at the end of three years in high school. At grade 3, just under half the mothers (48%) hoped their child would attend third level, a similar proportion (49%) that the child would

complete second level, and a small minority (3%) that the child would complete the Junior Certificate Examination. Mothers' educational aspirations for children in grade 5 were similar to those at grade 1. Sixty-two percent hoped their child would attend third level, 37% that he/she would complete second level, and 1% that the child would complete the Junior Certificate.

Educational aspirations are not related to children's achievements at grades 1 or 3 (Table 139). At grade 5, however, there is a significant relationship between mothers' educational aspirations for their child and the child's performance in math ( $r=.26$ ;  $p<.05$ ) and in reading ( $r=.38$ ;  $p<.01$ ).

**Educational Expectations.** Fewer mothers (36%) expected their child to attend a third-level college than hoped this would be the case and a greater proportion (56%) expected their child to complete second-level education and the Leaving Certificate Examination as compared to 40% who hoped for this. At grade 1, just over a third of mothers (36%) expected their child to go to third level, over half (57%) expected him/her to complete the Leaving Certificate, while 4% expected that he/she would complete the Junior Certificate, and 3% that the child would attend one or two years at second level and leave without sitting a State examination.

At grade 3, a smaller proportion (28%) expected their child to go to third level, 60% expected him/her to complete the Leaving Certificate, and 12% expected that the child would complete the Junior Certificate.

Table 139

**Correlation Coefficients for Relationship Between Mothers' Educational Aspirations and Expectations and Their Children's Math and Reading Achievements at Grades 1, 3, and 5**

		<b>Educational aspirations</b>	<b>Educational expectations</b>
<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Math</b>	.21	.22
		n:78	n:76
		p=.06	p=.06
	<b>Reading</b>	.12	.13
		n:94	n:92
		p=.25	p=.21
<b>Grade 3</b>	<b>Math</b>	-.03	.12
		n:50	n:49
		p=.85	p=.43
	<b>Reading</b>	-.11	-.02
		n:57	n:56
		p=.44	p=.90
<b>Grade 5</b>	<b>Math</b>	.26	.19
		n:63	n:63
		p=.04	p=.13
	<b>Reading</b>	.38	.37
		n:74	n:75
		p=.001	p=.001

Mothers of children in grade 5 also had high educational expectations for their children. Forty percent expected them to go to third level, about half (51%) expected them to complete second level, while only 8% expected that the child would complete the Junior Certificate. One mother (1.3%) expected that her child would leave the formal education system after elementary school.

Educational expectations are not significantly related to math or reading achievements at either grades 1 or 3, and only to reading achievement at grade 5 ( $r=.37$ ;  $p<.01$ ) (Table 139).

**Performance Aspirations.** Mothers were asked to rate how well they wanted and expected their child to do at school. Mothers of children at all grade levels held high performance aspirations for their children. At grade 1, about a fifth (21%) of mothers said that they would like their child to be “the very best in the class,” almost half (48%) would like him/her to be “better than most,” and 29% were satisfied if the child was “about average.”

At grade 3, mothers' performance aspirations were slightly lower with only 11% expressing the wish that their child would be “the very best in the class,” 50% hoping that the child would be “better than most,” and 39% hoping that the child's performance would be “about average.”

Mothers' performance aspirations for their children were lowest at grade 5. Only 7% hoped that their child would be top of their class; just over half (52%) that they would be better than most; and 42% that they would be “about average.”

There is no relationship between mothers' performance aspirations and children's achievements at grades 1 and 3 (Table 140). At grade 5, however, mothers' performance aspirations are significantly related to math ( $r=.29$ ;  $p<.05$ ) and reading ( $r=.35$ ;  $p<.01$ ) achievements.



Table 140

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Mothers' Performance Aspirations and Expectations and Their Children's Math and Reading Achievements at Grades 1, 3, and 5**

		Performance aspirations	Performance expectations
Grade 1	Math	.06	.18
		n:78	n:78
		p=.62	p=.12
	Reading	.14	.19
		n:94	n:94
		p=.19	p=.06
Grade 3	Math	.08	.17
		n:51	n:51
		p=.59	p=.23
	Reading	.08	.14
		n:58	n:58
		p=.58	p=.30
Grade 5	Math	.29	.35
		n:63	n:63
		p=.02	p=.005
	Reading	.35	.43
		n:75	n:75
		p=.002	p=.00

**Performance Expectations.** Mothers' performance expectations were lower than their aspirations. Forty-three percent expected their child's performance to be average, 47% expected their child to perform better than most in the class, while 6% expected their child to be the very best in the class. At grade 1, less than a tenth (8%) of mothers expected their child to be top of the class; 50% expected their child to be

above average; 40% expected that their child would be average; and 2% expected that their child would not do as well as most others.

The pattern at grade 3 was similar. A slightly smaller percentage (7%) of mothers expected their child to be best in the class; 45% expected him/her to be better than most; 44% expected their child to be average; and 5% expected that their child would do less well than most others.

Mothers of children in grade 5 held the lowest performance expectations of all. Only 3% expected their child to be best in the class; 46% expected him/her to be better than most others; and 46% expected that he/she would be about average. A further 5% of mothers expected their child to do less well than most others.

There was no significant relationship between performance expectations and pupil achievements at either grade 1 or grade 3 (Table 140). At grade 5, however, mothers' performance expectations for their children were directly related to math ( $r=.35$ ;  $p<.01$ ) and reading ( $r=.43$ ;  $p<.01$ ) achievements.

In general then, the relationships between the various aspirational and expectational variables and children's achievements are more stable at grade 5 than at lower grades. The relationships also tend to be stronger with reading than with math achievement.

## Relationships Between School-Related Support Measures and Children's Achievements

### Supportive School Environment

Eighteen items assessing mothers' perceptions of school were grouped to form a measure of supportive school environment. The items were the following: whether or not parents were invited to visit the school before the child was enrolled in the school; whether or not parents met the school principal before the child was enrolled in the school; existence of a parents' room in the school; whether or not parents in the school help with school activities; or in classrooms (all coded 1=no; 2=yes); whether mothers perceive that it is easy to meet a teacher (1=disagree a lot; 2=disagree a bit; 3=don't know; 4=agree a bit; 5=agree a lot); feelings of intrusion in the school (1=agree a lot; 2=agree a bit; 3=don't know; 4=disagree a bit; 5=disagree a lot); benefit to child of speaking to teacher; teacher pleased to see parents; teachers interested in parents' opinions about child's education (all coded 1=disagree a lot; 2=disagree a bit; 3=don't know; 4=agree a bit; 5=agree a lot); teachers prefer parents to keep out of school (1=agree a lot; 2=agree a bit; 3=don't know; 4=disagree a bit; 5=disagree a lot); teachers interested in every child in the class (1=disagree a lot; 2=disagree a bit; 3=don't know; 4=agree a bit; 5=agree a lot); whether or not mother has met teacher (1=no; 2=yes); frequency of such meetings (1=once; 2=twice; 3=3 or 4 times; 4=5 times or more); frequency of written school reports sent home (1=never; 2=once a year; 3=twice a year; 4=once a term; 5=more often); attitude to teachers

visiting homes (1=bad idea; 2=don't know; 3=good idea); whether or not home had been visited by someone from school (1=no; 2=yes); and degree to which mothers felt they had a say in school matters (1=disagree a lot; 2=disagree a bit; 3=don't know; 4=agree a bit; 5=agree a lot).

About half the mothers reported that they had been invited to visit the school prior to the enrollment of their first child, while the remaining half said that they had not. Slightly more than half (55%) said that they had found out about the school by meeting the school principal while the remainder had not done this.

A vast majority of mothers (92%) were aware of the existence of a parents' room in the school, and a similar percentage (97%) knew that parents helped out in the school. Fewer mothers (70%) stated that parents helped in classrooms which reflected the actual situation in schools (in one school, this did not happen at all and most mothers were correct in their knowledge of this).

In general, mothers felt welcome in schools. Only a small majority (11%) agreed that they would feel they were intruding by visiting the school uninvited. Others did not feel this was so. A vast majority (93%) disagreed that teachers would prefer to keep parents out of schools. Almost all mothers (98%) agreed that teachers were pleased to meet parents, and a greater percentage (99%) agreed that they could see their child's teacher whenever they wanted to.

Mothers also had positive views towards teachers, with a vast majority (95%) agreeing that teachers were interested in their opinions, a similar proportion (94%)

agreeing that speaking to the teacher helps a child's school progress, and slightly fewer (89%) agreeing with the view that teachers are interested in every child in their class.

Almost all mothers (99%) reported having spoken to their child's teacher during the school year. Of these, about four-tenths (43%) had done so "five times or more," a third (32%) had done so "three or four times," about a fifth (19%) spoke to the teacher "twice," and the remaining mothers (7%) had spoken "once" to the teacher.

A majority of mothers also reported having received a written school report. Over four-tenths (44%) received such a report "once a year," less than a third (31%) had received one "twice a year," while less than a fifth (16%) had received a written report "once a term." Less than a tenth (9%) of mothers responded that they had "never" received a written school report.

Over two-thirds (67%) of mothers reported that they had never had a visit from school personnel while a third (33%) reported having had somebody from the school visit their home. While there was overall agreement among mothers that home visits were a positive thing (73% stated that it was "a good idea"), a majority of mothers (4 out of every 5) who stated that it was "a bad idea" had not actually been visited themselves. Since a majority (85%) of mothers who had actually been visited felt that such visits were "a good idea," it seems that, in general, the visits themselves were associated with more positive attitudes towards the idea and that the negative

attitudes of some mothers towards home visits would be changed by having somebody visit them at home.

Mothers in general felt empowered in relation to school matters, with four-fifths (80%) agreeing “a bit” or “a lot” that they had a say in what happened in the school.

Each of the supportive school environment variables was correlated with math and reading achievements at grades 1, 3, and 5 (see Tables 141 - 143).

Very few of the correlation coefficients are significant. At grade 1, there are no significant relationships between the supportive school environment variables and pupils' math and reading achievements.

At grade 3, frequency of written school reports sent home is significantly related to math ( $r=.29$ ;  $p<.05$ ) but not to reading. Similarly, the variable “parents have a say in school matters” is significantly related to math ( $r=.29$ ;  $p<.01$ ) but not to reading.

Mothers' knowledge of whether or not parents helped in classrooms is significantly related to reading at grade 3 ( $r=.29$ ;  $p<.05$ ), indicating that children of mothers who were aware of this tended to perform better than others. Whether or not somebody from the school had visited the home is also significantly related to reading at grade 3 ( $r=.26$ ;  $p<.05$ ) with children of mothers who reported that somebody had visited their home performing slightly better than others.

Table 141

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Supportive School  
Environment Variables and Math and Reading Scores: Grade 1**

	Math scores	Reading scores
Parents invited to visit school before first child enrolled	.09	.23
Parents spoke to principal before first child enrolled	.02	-.13
School has a parents' room	-.10	-.09
Parents help with school activities	-.12	.00
Parents help in classrooms	-.03	.15
Easy to meet teacher	.05	.09
Feelings of intrusion in the school	.12	.19
Speaking to teacher helps child do well	-.11	.04
Teachers pleased when parents visit them	-.02	.05
Teachers interested in parents' opinions about child's education	.09	.19
Teachers would like to keep parents out of the school	.07	.14
Teachers interested in every child in the class	-.16	.09
Mother met teacher during school year	--	--
Frequency of meetings with teacher	-.02	.12
Frequency of written school reports sent home	-.11	.04
Attitude to teachers visiting homes	-.05	-.04
Home visited by school representative	.12	.03
Parents have a say in school matters	.08	.12

\*p&lt;.05

\*\*p&lt;.01

--correlation coefficient could not be calculated due to lack of variance in responses

Table 142

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Supportive School  
Environment Variables and Math and Reading Scores: Grade 3**

	Math scores	Reading scores
Parents invited to visit school before first child enrolled	-.04	-.11
Parents spoke to principal before first child enrolled	.09	-.08
School has a parents' room	-.15	.01
Parents help with school activities	-.15	-.21
Parents help in classrooms	-.13	.29*
Easy to meet teacher	.22	.06
Feelings of intrusion in the school	.21	.21
Speaking to teacher helps child do well	.06	-.04
Teachers pleased when parents visit them	-.03	-.13
Teachers interested in parents' opinions about child's education	.09	-.09
Teachers would like to keep parents out of the school	-.09	-.12
Teachers interested in every child in the class	.03	-.05
Mother met teacher during school year	--	--
Frequency of meetings with teacher	-.21	-.13
Frequency of written school reports sent home	.29*	.25
Attitude to teachers visiting homes	.13	.23
Home visited by school representative	-.09	.26*
Parents have a say in school matters	.29**	-.01

\*p&lt;.05

\*\*p&lt;.01

-- correlation coefficient could not be calculated due to lack of variance in responses



Table 143

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Supportive School  
Environment Variables and Math and Reading Scores: Grade 5**

	Math scores	Reading scores
Parents invited to visit school before first child enrolled	-.29	.01
Parents spoke to principal before first child enrolled	-.18	-.11
School has a parents' room	.19	.05
Parents help with school activities	-.11	-.01
Parents help in classrooms	-.16	.12
Easy to meet teacher	.06	-.06
Feelings of intrusion in the school	.07	.10
Speaking to teacher helps child do well	.09	.14
Teachers pleased when parents visit them	-.15	.07
Teachers interested in parents' opinions about child's education	-.00	.14
Teachers would like to keep parents out of the school	.11	.09
Teachers interested in every child in the class	-.06	.12
Mother met teacher during school year	-.04	.25*
Frequency of meetings with teacher	.15	.20
Frequency of written school reports sent home	.12	-.07
Attitude to teachers visiting homes	-.10	-.03
Home visited by school representative	-.13	-.05
Parents have a say in school matters	-.16	-.03

\*p<.05

At grade 5, whether or not the pupil's mother met the teacher is significantly related to reading ( $r=.25$ ;  $p<.05$ ) but not to math.

The limited variance in the responses to most of the supportive school environment variables is the most likely explanation for the lack of significant correlation coefficients. The reliability of the full version of the supportive school environment scale is relatively low ( $\alpha=.54$ ). Using the same iterative process (as described earlier) to delete items that did not contribute to the internal consistency of the scale, a supportive school environment scale comprising 8 items was constructed ( $\alpha=.66$ ). Table 144 contains a list of the items. There is no significant relationship between the supportive school environment scale and pupils' math or reading achievements (see Table 145) at any grade level.

### Conclusion

The achievement data described in this chapter were intended to serve as baseline data for comparison with data collected four years later. This will provide one comparative measure on which to examine the effects, if any, of HSCL programs on children's achievements. The interpretation of such effects will be problematic, however, primarily since the focus of HSCL programs was not directly on children or their achievements but tended to be on mothers' self-development.

The general patterns of low or no significant correlations between pupil achievements and mothers' characteristics were not surprising given the restricted variances in mothers' responses.

Table 144

Items Comprising the Supportive School Environment Scale

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Parents spoke to principal before first child enrolled

Speaking to teacher helps child do well

Teachers pleased when parents visit them

Teachers interested in parents' opinions about child education

Teachers interested in every child in the class

Mother spoke to teacher during school year

Frequency of written school reports sent home

Parents have a say in school matters

Reliability coefficient (alpha)=.6629

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Table 145

**Correlation Coefficients for the Relationship Between Supportive School  
Environment Scale (8 items) and Math and Reading Achievements**

		Math	Reading
Supportive school environment scale	Grade 1	-.08	.15
		n:78	n:94
		p=.51	p=.16
	Grade 3	.17	-.04
		n:51	n:58
		p=.25	p=.76
	Grade 5	-.07	.14
		n:63	n:75
		p=.60	p=.23

## CHAPTER XI

### EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Activities Before the HSCL Scheme

All participating schools had a number of basic structures in place to facilitate home-school relationships before the inception of the HSCL scheme. These included, for most schools, Boards of Management with parental representation, parent committees, open days, and parent-teacher meetings. In several schools, parents helped out with extra-curricular activities. Parents seemed to have reasonable access to schools, especially at the point at which their children were entering the school. They were also informed of their children's school progress.

Despite the arrangements that were in place in schools to promote home-school contacts before the HSCL scheme began, it was recognized that more needed to be done. Some schools had relatively few structures or activities and all probably needed to expand the range of activities in which they were engaged. Further, the quality of home-school contacts in most cases could not be regarded as entirely satisfactory. For the most part, the role of parents was a relatively passive one, for some in the deliberations of governance and advocacy bodies, for the rest in receiving

communications from the school about their children's school progress and behavior. Besides, parents who become involved in governance and in helping out with extra-curricular activities are generally self-selective and may not at all be representative of the general parent body, much less of parents who may be uninvolved in their children's education. A consideration of the existing state of affairs relating to home-school relationships before the commencement of the HSCL scheme indicated a need for the school to adopt a more proactive role in promoting home-school relationships. Three major approaches seemed appropriate. The first would involve increasing the variety and quantity of home-school contacts. Secondly, the quality of the contacts would need to be improved. In particular, there was a need to promote a more central and active role among parents in their children's education. And thirdly, there was a need to ensure that as great a number as possible of parents would be involved in home-school activities. This would no doubt require special efforts to target in a more systematic and vigorous manner parents who were uninvolved and might have difficulty in becoming more involved.

#### Activities in HSCL Programs

One indication of how HSCL programs were constructed and implemented in schools and in the community may be obtained by examining how coordinators spent their time. While the picture that emerges from this examination may not reflect the experiences of schools or of parents, it should provide information on the main thrust of programs. When we examine coordinators' use of time, we find that, on average,

most time (31%) was devoted to parent courses and activities. This finding may be paralleled with the findings of a survey of parents carried out in six selected schools that among parents who became involved in HSCL programs, the most common activity was attendance at courses. Just over a quarter (26%) of coordinators' time was spent on home visits. Rather less time was devoted to meetings and contacts within the school with principals (7%), teachers (8%), and pupils (3%). Individual meetings with parents occupied 10% of time, and contacting agencies or individuals in the community 9 percent. The remaining time was spent on arranging funding for HSCL programs (2%) and a variety of other activities (4%).

It will be noted that work with parents (either in school or the home) took up two-thirds (67%) of coordinators' time. By contrast, only 15% of time was spent with school staff and 9% in community-related activities. It can be accepted on the basis of these data that concern with parents was the main preoccupation of coordinators. This may help explain why some teachers did not think that programs were sufficiently well integrated into schools or did not adequately address their immediate problems. The approach, however, was being faithful to the aims of the HSCL scheme to promote active cooperation between home and school and to raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills. The procedures adopted to promote these aims would appear to have focused more directly on parents rather than on intervention in the general community.

When we examine the precise courses and activities which schools offered in the second and third year of the operation of the HSCL scheme, we find that the most popular from the schools' point of view in both years were ones directly related to children's education. Over 90% of schools in the second year were involved in such activities as providing classes in the children's school subjects in order to equip parents to help their children with homework. Parents also assisted in the classroom, in paired-reading programs, in meetings, or in the library. While these activities were continued in the third year, the percentage of involved schools decreased to about 70. There was also a decrease in the number of schools offering self-development courses. However, the number of schools offering parenting, leisure, and parents' education courses increased.

The parents' point of view, however, was somewhat different if we can take the experience in the six schools selected for special study as representative of programs as a whole. As we have just seen, attending courses would appear to have been the most salient feature of HSCL programs for parents. Almost 80% of those involved in programs attended courses, compared to 58% who attended school-based activities, and 41% who were engaged in classroom activities.

### The Impact of HSCL Programs on Schools

It is clear that a major advantage of the HSCL scheme was in its provision of a coordinator to liaise with parents and the community outside the school. This was found to be a boon to teachers and in many schools, the coordinator was able to



facilitate contacts between teachers and parents. Sometimes school timetables were adjusted to do this. In most schools, the number of teachers who interacted with parents increased during the first three years of the scheme.

In a number of schools, school staff were perceived by coordinators to have become more open and tolerant, both in dealings among themselves and in relation to parents. Some teachers who at an early stage had resisted parent involvement in the classroom now welcomed it. However, resistance to this idea continued among others.

In four out of five schools, the school's role in the community had been perceived by coordinators to change. Schools had a higher profile and in some schools contact with community agencies had grown.

At a general level, the HSCL scheme has made teachers think about the role of parents in the school and in education. At a more specific level, it has got teachers to think about how they might involve parents in the school or in the classroom. Teachers realize, however, that parent involvement, particularly in the classroom, needs to be part of a well thought-out and structured program which has been developed with considerable input from teachers.

With improved parent-teacher relations, teachers found that problems became easier to deal with and parents easier to contact. Parents, in turn, found it easier to approach teachers. At least some teachers in more than half the schools involved parents in a variety of activities, from accompanying children to swimming to helping

in classroom activities. However, in most schools in which such activities took place, only some teachers were involved.

Teachers for their part in more than half of schools also helped out with other HSCL activities. Again, it was more usual to find only some teachers in a school rather than all or most engaged in such activities. The implication of this is that care must be taken to avoid isolating teachers who are fearful of or who are not involved in HSCL programs.

In general, the picture is one in which changes occurred in schools as a result of HSCL programs. Further, changes in teachers' attitudes towards parents—their role in the home and in the school—were more frequently positive than negative. However, there is variation between schools in the extent to which HSCL programs impacted on schools. And even where there was an impact, it did not touch all teachers.

### Impact on Parents

It is clear from the design of, and thinking behind, HSCL programs that parents were perceived to occupy a key role in attaining program objectives. It is thus of considerable interest to look at the impact of programs on parents. It would be more accurate to speak of mothers than of parents. Given the potential influence of mothers on their children's educational development, it was reasonable that they should have been the target of activity. There was, of course, also the more practical consideration

that it was more often mothers rather than fathers who came to the school. As a consequence, the data in this report refer almost exclusively to mothers.

The views of coordinators and teachers are in general agreement in seeing considerable benefit for mothers arising from HSCL programs. In an increasing number of schools throughout the first three years of the scheme, and in the final year in all schools, parents' personal development was perceived by both coordinators and teachers to have benefited from participation in HSCL programs. Thus, sometimes based on comments made by parents themselves, the self-confidence, parenting skills, and home-management skills of parents were perceived to have improved. Benefits were seen to accrue primarily from involvement in courses. Information from parents in the six selected schools endorses the observations of coordinators. Parents described a number of benefits, including the development of a mutual support system among themselves and growth in self-confidence, as accruing to them from involvement in HSCL activities.

In a large majority of schools, parents' attitudes towards involvement in the school had been perceived by coordinators to become more positive. Parents had developed a new interest in what happened in school, came to the school more frequently, were more aware of the working of schools, talked more about educational issues, and had a greater awareness of the classroom situation and of the problems of teachers.

Parents in some schools were beginning to show evidence of a growth in "empowerment." They became aware of the importance of their role in their children's

education and began to feel that they had a say in what went on at school. Their attitudes to the school became more positive and they felt more at home in the school and in dealing with teachers. They asked if they could help without waiting to be asked and, in particular, volunteered for HSCL activities. They helped their children at homework following attendance at courses (in e.g., reading) and in general felt comfortable about it. Finally, some parents felt confident enough to help in the classroom.

Involvement in classroom activities was reported by practically all parents who had helped in the classroom as having conferred a variety of benefits. Parents said they had learned more about the teacher's job, more about what being in the classroom is like for a child, and more about the problems teachers have to deal with. As a result, they found it easier to ask teachers questions, learned ways of helping with their children's schooling, and became more confident about doing it.

While HSCL programs were perceived in all schools to have had an impact on parents (at least in terms of general activities in the school), at the same time there were differences between parents in the degree to which their attitudes had been perceived to change. Clearly also, there were considerable differences in the extent to which parents had become involved in HSCL activities. Some teachers thought that a core of parents had become involved and that these perhaps were the ones who least needed the support of a home-school scheme, while those most in need—parents with social or economic problems, literacy problems, parents of troublesome children or of ones that were frequently absent from school, parents who lacked confidence in

themselves—were not involved. However, coordinators were very conscious of the need to target these parents and most made every effort to meet them, particularly through home visits.

When the HSCL programs had been running in schools for a period of two years, a survey was carried out to obtain more systematic data from mothers themselves that might throw light on the question of involvement and its correlates. Interviews were conducted with mothers of pupils in the six selected schools who had been identified by coordinators as “involved” in the HSCL program, “not involved but not needing help,” and “not involved but needing help.”

A number of demographic characteristics were found to distinguish uninvolved mothers described as needing help from the other categories of mother. Such uninvolved mothers were more likely to come from a one-parent family, to have more children, and where there were two parents in the family, the uninvolved (needing help) were more likely to be unemployed.

The uninvolved group (needing help) also differed from the involved parents and frequently from the uninvolved group that was not considered to need help on a number of practices and attitudes related to the child's educational environment, at home and at school. Thus, parents in the uninvolved group considered to need help were less likely to have read to their child when younger, less likely to read themselves, less likely to talk to their child about something seen on television or that had been read, and less likely to check the child's television viewing or reading. They also were more likely to perceive that their child was doing less well than other

children at school, to feel that they could not help their child with homework, and to expect their child to leave school at a younger age. In general, uninvolved mothers considered not to need help were more like involved mothers than like uninvolved ones considered to be in need of help.

These findings on the characteristics of uninvolved parents lend support to teachers' views about who had become involved and who had not in HSCL programs. They also indicate the need for increased efforts to increase the level of involvement of those described as uninvolved but needing help.

### Impact on Pupils

Limited information is available on the impact of HSCL programs on children. Anyhow, one would expect that effects at the pupil level would be likely to be long-term, beyond the life of the present evaluation. However, while effects, for example, on student achievement are likely to be longer term and while data on one of the aims of the HSCL scheme relating to students' continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level education are clearly beyond the time-scale of the evaluation, at the same time one might expect at this stage to be able to detect some processes and behaviors that would suggest by their presence a real probability that longer term goals would be achieved.

A number of effects on pupils were reported by coordinators in a majority of schools. For the most part, the effects referred mainly to "some" pupils (sometimes as few as one or two pupils with whom the coordinator or another staff member had

intervened directly). Effects included improved behavior, improved attendance, improved scholastic achievement, greater care in their school work, and more positive attitudes to school and teachers, to themselves, and to their parents. Coordinators also reported that pupils had received more practical help with school work. This was particularly evident in schools in which parents assisted in classroom activities or other activities (e.g., computers, paired reading) with pupils. Over two-thirds of involved mothers also reported that, as a consequence of their involvement in courses, they had learned how to help their child(ren) with school work. This was true for a greater percentage of those who had been involved in classrooms.

Teachers noted some of these effects also, pointing in addition to the fact that the presence of parents in classrooms (at junior level) made children happier. The majority of older pupils (fifth class) who were interviewed during the evaluation, however, did not favor the presence of their own parents in their classroom. Few teachers saw any immediate effects on pupils' scholastic performance. Most felt that such effects would take longer to emerge.

### Community Involvement

One of the aims of the HSCL scheme is to promote active cooperation between home, school, and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of children. In pursuit of this aim, coordinators, on average, devoted about 9% of their time to contacting a variety of agencies and individuals. Over the three years in which the scheme has been in operation, a large number of agencies and

individuals were contacted. Initially, contact was mainly to publicize and explain the HSCL scheme, to find out more about agencies and individuals, to establish relationships with them, and to seek resources. As time went on, contacts were established with voluntary agencies (e.g., youth organizations, social services), health and social service agencies/individuals (e.g., public health nurse, social worker), groups involved in parents' education (Vocational Education Committees), a number of local initiatives (e.g., women's groups), and others. There was a marked increase from the second to the third year of the scheme in the numbers of schools for which coordinators contacted local agencies or individuals. While the greatest percentage of schools which had contacted any individual agency or person in the second year was 32 (and this was high for the year), by the following year a greater percentage had contacted three agencies/individuals and close to 30% had contacted four further agencies or individuals. In both years, the Vocational Education Committee was the agency contacted by the greatest number of schools. Other agencies/individuals that attracted contact from a relatively high number of schools in both years were public health nurses and social workers. There was considerable variation between schools in the precise agencies or individuals that were contacted.

Coordinators' assessments of the extent to which a variety of community agencies or individuals contributed to the success of HSCL programs can be interpreted as providing an indication of their perceptions of what the main thrust of programs should be. Their assessments are of particular interest in the context of the balance that had to be struck between goals which emphasize the longer term



development of parents and community and ones that are related to alleviation of the day-to-day problems of families and children.

When we examine coordinators' ratings of the extent to which community agencies and individuals had contributed to the success of HSCL programs, we find that the most valued contributions were judged to have come from agencies which one would expect to provide services relating to the long-term development of parents and communities. Thus, the agency most frequently named as having contributed to a great extent to program success was one that provides parent education courses and resources for programs (VECs). Also relatively frequently named were agencies that have as their concern the economic and social development of areas (city corporations, Area Partnership Companies).

At the same time, the "emergency" aspect of services was not neglected by coordinators and could hardly be, given the family problems that they would inevitably encounter in their work. Thus, social workers, community police, public health nurses, and child care and family guidance centers were perceived to have contributed to the success of HSCL programs. But their contribution was much more frequently judged to be "to some extent" rather than "to a great extent."

Differences in the weight assigned to community agencies and individuals by different coordinators probably reflects a difference in emphasis between the HSCL programs of schools. In some schools, greater weight was assigned to the contribution of development agencies while in others greater weight was assigned to

individuals and services that could provide immediate support in dealing with problems.

It was envisaged that Local Committees, made up of representatives from schools, parents/families, and local statutory and voluntary organizations, should play an important part in the development of relationships between schools, homes, and the community. At an early stage in the scheme, the issue of Local Committees generated much concern among some principals, chairpersons of Boards of Management, and local coordinators, a concern that was reflected in the pace at which Local Committees were established. By the end of the first year of the scheme, only 25 schools had established a Committee, while at the end of the third year only 33 had such a Committee.

Though slow to develop, by the end of the third year of the scheme, Local Committees had begun to play a greater role in planning and decision making in relation to HSCL activities. However, many teachers remained unaware of the existence of Local Committees, much less of their role or function. A number of problems emerged regarding the operation of Local Committees. These included identification of the role of Committees, the role of parents, poor attendance, and lack of contact between the Committees and other agencies. Despite such problems, the concept of a Local Committee was perceived by school personnel as worthy.

Factors identified by coordinators as having contributed to the success of a Local Committee where one was established included parent awareness of HSCL

programs, support from the school principal, the degree of cooperation and effort exhibited by committee members, and community awareness of HSCL activities.

### Conclusion

This overview of the operation of HSCL programs in their first two or three years of operation in schools indicates that a considerable amount of activity was generated in schools. Schools provided a wide range of courses for parents (mothers), including self-development courses, parenting courses, classes in the school curriculum, and leisure courses. Homes were visited and opportunities were provided in schools for parents to meet socially. Parents became involved in a variety of school activities, both in the classroom and outside it. The reaction to such activity, among teachers and parents, was very positive. It seems reasonable to conclude on the basis of such activities and of the reactions of all involved in HSCL liaison programs—coordinators, parents, and teachers—that a major start had been made in meeting one of the aims of the scheme—to promote active cooperation between home and school.

There is also some evidence that movement had occurred towards the achievement of a second aim of the scheme—to raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills. This conclusion may be inferred from observations that some parents had increased in self-confidence, knew more about what was happening in school, and had learned how to help their children with school work.

Judging the extent to which another aim of the project—to enhance the active participation of children in the learning process, in particular those that might be at risk of failure—was achieved is more problematic since effects on pupil achievement of a project such as the HSCL scheme would be likely to be long-term rather than short-term. There will be an opportunity in a few years time to compare the scholastic achievements of students in participating schools with achievements at the inception of the scheme. At this stage, we can only comment on the likelihood that the type of programs that have been implemented will be found to have impacted on students' scholastic progress.

While programs were in general comprehensive in nature, their major focus, insofar as one can judge from the activities that were generated, can be described as cognitive-behavioral. Furthermore, most activities were directed towards mothers and, in particular, towards providing them with opportunities for self-development. Opportunities were also provided in classes dealing with the curriculum of schools and by having mothers present in classrooms. Classroom presence was designed to increase mothers' sensitivity to the importance of their role in the educational process and to develop their skills for interacting with their children in ways that would promote the children's educational development. However, fewer schools and mothers were involved in such activities than were involved in self-development activities. It could be argued that a greater emphasis on such activities would be more likely than parent development courses to impact on children's school learning. Such an emphasis would also be likely to meet the needs of the greatest majority of parents who

participated in programs who gave as their reason for participation "to be more involved in children's education." By contrast, only minorities gave as reasons "to improve my own education" or "to learn more about a pastime."

Reference in the aims of the HSCL scheme to meeting the needs of children considered to be most at risk prompts an examination of the characteristics of "involved" and "non-involved" mothers. In the survey of mothers, it was found that those identified as uninvolved and in need of help were in fact in need of greater support in the task of enhancing the educational environment of their children than were parents who were actively involved in programs. The fact that coordinators were aware of this problem and sought to address it by visiting a greater proportion of such uninvolved homes should serve to underline the intractable nature of the problem of involving such parents. While one cannot discount the possibility that further visits or networking of parents will produce a more positive response in the future, neither can one be sure that this will be the case. At this stage, a search for alternative strategies would seem in order. These might involve more intensive work in the home with mothers. This, of course, would be labor-intensive and may not be possible within the present resources of HSCL programs.

The community-based aspect of the HSCL scheme received less emphasis in programs than cognitive-behavioral aspects. This is not surprising since there is a reference to community in only one of the aims of the HSCL scheme and that is limited to enhancing "active cooperation between home, school, and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children." In

evaluating the effectiveness of the HSCL programs in achieving the aim regarding community involvement, it is necessary to distinguish two types of community-based programs. One recognizes that since many agencies besides the family play a role in supporting child development, partnership with a variety of formal and informal social systems and organizations may be necessary to create optimal conditions for children's development. The other type of program, recognizing that the problems of disadvantage very often have their origins in the conditions of the communities in which families live, communities that may lack services, organization, and leadership, see development of the community itself as a prerequisite to sustaining the effects of any intervention that may be implemented to support children's development. Both the aim of the scheme and the way in which programs have developed suggest that the former type of program is what was envisaged in the HSCL scheme. If this is so, programs may be regarded as having met the scheme's aim insofar as many coordinators have been successful in establishing links with relevant community agencies. The extension and development of local committees should serve to further facilitate this work.

Finally, we may consider the extent to which programs have been successful in bringing schools to the point that they provide a more appropriate educational environment for children. There is no doubt that schools have changed. They are more accommodating of parents, are providing a wide range of services for them, and are allowing them to participate more actively in the work of the school and of classrooms. One might expect this trend to continue until all teachers have some

involvement in home-school programs. It seems unlikely, however, given the constraints under which schools operate that radical changes will occur in their organization and functioning.

Even if radical changes in the organization and functioning of schools are not to be expected, it does, however, seem appropriate to explore further how schools, under present constraints, are dealing with problems of disadvantage. There have been several initiatives at the national level designed to deal with disadvantage which have allowed schools to purchase materials, to reduce class size, and to provide remedial and psychological services. However, these initiatives have so far either been evaluated in isolation or not at all. It would seem appropriate at this stage to examine the impact of the variety of measures that have been taken from the point of view of individual schools. Now that HSCL programs, together with other programs, are well-established in schools, such an examination should provide useful information for policy decisions on the relative effectiveness of existing measures as well as on the possible need for other approaches to deal with the problems of disadvantage. While it would be unrealistic to expect individual initiatives such as the HSCL scheme to solve the problems of disadvantage, it may not be unrealistic to expect that a combination of approaches would serve to alleviate them. There is already evidence from elsewhere that such a combination would be likely to be more effective than single-focus strategies.

A multi-faceted approach to meeting the needs of educationally disadvantaged students is favored in recent major interventions in the United States. While

interventions vary in their emphasis and in detail, major efforts, such as Success for All Schools (Slavin, 1989), Accelerated Schools (Levin, 1987), and School Development Program (Comer, 1988), all share certain characteristics. First, all encourage a highly contextualized curriculum placing great emphasis on reading and language skills. Second, all involve smaller classes to facilitate individual attention and the development of relationships between teachers and pupils. Third, all emphasize the important role that parents must play in their children's educational experiences. Fourth, all approaches include governance structures designed to empower schools to develop a unity of purpose to focus and build on strengths. Finally, all programs operate at the elementary school level, emphasizing prevention over remediation. All also show a commitment to preschool experiences (see King, 1994).

The HSCL scheme shares some of the features of these approaches but also differs from them in a number of respects. The most obvious similarity is to be found in the role assigned to parents. For both the HSCL scheme and the American interventions, parents occupy a central role. The Irish approach is probably closest to the Success for All Schools in its approach to parental involvement. While it accepts the Accelerated School philosophy that there is room for considerable variety in how parents get involved as long as they get involved, it also shares the more structured approach of the Success for All Schools in its provision of a local coordinator, in its conduct of home visits, in its parenting workshops, in offering strategies for helping children at home, in recruiting parents to volunteer in schools, and in its provision of referrals to social agencies (see Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1991).



Although not an integral part of the HSCL scheme, reduced pupil-teacher ratios, as a consequence of other interventions for schools in disadvantaged areas, are a feature of the Irish approach as of American approaches. However, additional teachers are often used to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio across the board in a school rather than ensuring that additional teacher service is targeted on the most disadvantaged.

The Irish approach is also similar to the American ones in its promotion of parent involvement in school governance. However, the approaches differ insofar as the Irish approach emphasizes the role of local committees in community involvement, while the American approach focuses parents' activities on the challenges faced by schools.

The areas in which the Irish and American approaches diverge most relate to preschool intervention and curriculum. While preschool intervention has been a feature of other attempts to deal with disadvantage in Ireland (Kellaghan, 1977b), it does not figure in the HSCL scheme. Modification of curriculum, a key feature of current and past American interventions, was also a feature of earlier Irish efforts (Kellaghan, 1977b). In the light of such experience, at home and abroad, it would seem reasonable to now consider the integration of preschool and curriculum components with the HSCL scheme to provide a broader and more multi-faceted approach to the problems faced in disadvantaged schools.

## CHAPTER XII

### METAEVALUATION: APPLICATION OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE PROGRAM EVALUATION STANDARDS

This chapter examines the HSCL evaluation in the context of requirements of The Program Evaluation Standards (Joint Committee, 1994). These standards were developed and accredited for use in the United States of America and, as such, their applicability in other countries has not been established. While, as general principles of sound evaluations, the Joint Committee standards have been found to apply in other countries (see Torres & Piontek, 1992), it is true that their applicability is likely to be limited by the cultural context and factors such as the system of government, the legal system, and the tradition of using standards.

The metaevaluation was conducted by the evaluation director and, as such, the views and insights, and the evidence to support these, are presented from the perspective of someone who was closely involved in all aspects of the work over an extended period of time. It would, of course, be possible for others to conduct their own metaevaluation of the work.

An overview of the Joint Committee standards and findings of the metaevaluation are presented. The applicability of aspects of the Standards are discussed in the context of the findings of this meta-evaluation.

## **The Joint Committee Standards**

The Joint Committee **Program Evaluation Standards** set out principles of sound evaluation and are organized into four groups according to the four important attributes of an evaluation: utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy.

### **Utility Standards**

The requirements of the utility standards are that evaluations be informative, timely, and influential. The seven standards of utility are Stakeholder Identification, Evaluator Credibility, Information Scope and Selection, Values Identification, Report Clarity, Report Timeliness and Dissemination, and Evaluation Impact. In accordance with these standards, evaluators must define the audiences for the evaluation and become familiar with these audiences, determine the audiences' questions and information needs, ensure that evaluation plans and procedures address those needs, and provide clear and relevant reports at optimum times. In general, the utility standards determine how well an evaluation serves the practical information needs of specified audiences.

### **Feasibility Standards**

The feasibility standards take cognizance of the fact that evaluations are generally conducted in natural settings rather than in laboratories and that they require valuable resources. Therefore, evaluation plans must be practical for the given context and resources expended must be in line with information requirements. The three feasibility standards are Practical Procedures, Political Viability, and Cost Effectiveness and the overall requirements are that evaluations be realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and economical.

### **Propriety Standards**

The propriety standards are designed to ensure that, in conducting an evaluation, due regard is given to the rights of persons affected by the evaluation. The eight propriety standards are Service Orientation, Formal agreements, Rights of Human Subjects, Human Interactions, Complete and Fair Assessment, Disclosure of Findings, Conflict of Interest, and Fiscal Responsibility. By following these standards, those who conduct evaluations are guided to avoid unlawful, unscrupulous, and unethical practices.

### **Accuracy Standards**

Compliance with the accuracy standards ensures that evaluation information is comprehensive and technically sound, that important features of a program that determine its merit and worth have been examined, and that judgments are logically linked to the data. The 12 accuracy standards are Program Documentation, Context Analysis, Described Purposes and Procedures, Defensible Information Sources, Valid Information, Reliable Information, Systematic Information, Analysis of Quantitative Information, Analysis of Qualitative Information, Justified Conclusions, Impartial Reporting, and Metaevaluation.

### **Application of the Standards**

The following criteria (adapted from those used by Stufflebeam in an unpublished study) were applied in determining the extent to which the HSCL evaluation met the Joint Committee standards:

1. A standard was deemed to be satisfactorily addressed if the evaluation satisfied all or most of the stated requirements that were judged to be important to this evaluation and did not seriously violate any important requirement.
2. A standard was deemed to be partially addressed if the evaluation satisfied about half or fewer of the stated requirements judged to be important to this evaluation and did not seriously violate any important requirement.

3. A standard was judged as not addressed if most or all of the standard's requirements deemed important to this evaluation were only partially met or at least one important requirement was seriously violated.

4. A standard, or a requirement of the standard, was judged to be not applicable if, because of the context of the evaluation, or for some other reason, the standard was judged not to apply.

### Findings of the Metaevaluation

Details of the extent to which the HSCL evaluation fulfilled the requirements of each of the 30 Joint Committee standards are contained in Table 146. This section contains the summary statement of the relevant Joint Committee program evaluation standard, the metaevaluation judgment relating to that standard, and the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation in relation to the standard. Where the standard, or a related requirement within the standard, is deemed not to be relevant to the evaluation, the underlying reasons are outlined.

The evidence used to support the findings comes from written evaluation reports, correspondence, and minutes of meetings of the National Steering Committee, all of which materials are on file in the Educational Research Centre. Supporting evidence from this dissertation is also cited.

Table 146

## Application of the Joint Committee Standards to the Evaluation of the HSCL Scheme

Standard	Degree to Which Standard Addressed	Comments
<b>Utility Standards</b>		
U1 Stakeholder Identification	Satisfactorily addressed	
U2 Evaluator Credibility	Satisfactorily addressed	
U3 Information Scope and Selection	Satisfactorily addressed	
U4 Values Identification	Partially addressed	Value perspectives not always clear
U5 Report Clarity	Satisfactorily addressed	
U6 Report Timeliness and Dissemination	Partially addressed	Formal agreement on release of reports not applicable
U7 Evaluation Impact	Satisfactorily addressed	
<b>Feasibility Standards</b>		
F1 Practical Procedures	Satisfactorily addressed	
F2 Political Viability	Satisfactorily addressed	
F3 Cost Effectiveness	Satisfactorily addressed	
<b>Propriety Standards</b>		
P1 Service Orientation	Satisfactorily addressed	
P2 Formal Agreements	Partially addressed	More detailed evaluation agreement required
P3 Rights of Human Subjects	Satisfactorily addressed	
P4 Human Interactions	Satisfactorily addressed	
P5 Complete and Fair Assessment	Partially addressed	Technical report would enhance this aspect

Table 146—Continued

Standard	Degree to Which Standard Addressed	Comments
P6 Disclosure of Findings	Partially addressed	
P7 Conflict of Interest	Satisfactorily addressed	
P8 Fiscal Responsibility	Satisfactorily addressed	
Accuracy Standards		
A1 Program Documentation	Partially addressed	
A2 Context Analysis	Partially addressed	
A3 Described Purposes and Procedures	Partially addressed	No technical report
A4 Defensible Information Sources	Satisfactorily addressed	
A5 Valid Information	Partially addressed	
A6 Reliable Information	Satisfactorily addressed	
A7 Systematic Information	Satisfactorily addressed	
A8 Analysis of Quantitative Information	Satisfactorily addressed	
A9 Analysis of Qualitative Information	Satisfactorily addressed	
A10 Justified Conclusions	Satisfactorily addressed	
A11 Impartial Reporting	Satisfactorily addressed	
A12 Metaevaluation	Not addressed	No metaevaluation



## **U1 Stakeholder Identification**

### **Standard Statement**

Persons involved in or affected by the evaluation should be identified, so that their needs can be addressed.

### **Judgment**

This standard was satisfactorily addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. The membership of the National Steering Committee (as described in Chapter III) ensured an excellent forum for the discussion of emerging issues by representatives of all stakeholder groups. This included full review and input to the initial design of the evaluation and ongoing input throughout the course of the evaluation, e.g., suggestions to conduct achievement testing of pupils and interviews with pupils.

2. Before the evaluation was designed, the evaluation director requested that members of the National Steering Committee should consider what information they required from the evaluation throughout the three years and at the end of the evaluation (minutes of October 19, 1990 meeting). Subsequently, based on Committee discussion of the evaluation plan, it was possible to highlight to members

the limitations of the evaluation and to gain consensus on proceeding with a modified evaluation plan. The evaluation plan was subsequently presented to coordinators during their induction course and their suggestions were incorporated into the final plan which was then approved by the National Steering Committee.

3. At school level, information for the evaluation was provided by all stakeholders, including principals, coordinators, teachers, parents, and pupils and this ensured that issues relevant to the implementation of the scheme were identified and reported to the National Steering Committee on a regular basis (approximately every two months).

4. The relationship between the Department of Education management team and the evaluators was such that pertinent management and political issues were made known and considered in the context of the evaluation. This happened on an ongoing basis through meetings and discussions with the management team and the National Coordinator. The clearest example of this related to the preparation of the Interim Evaluation Report, for which there was close collaboration between the management team and other Department personnel and the evaluators in identifying the issues, in discussing the implications of the findings, and in formulating recommendations that were responsive to the issues and that would be reasonable to implement in the given context.

### Weaknesses of the Evaluation

1. There may have been an over reliance on the National Steering Committee as a forum for obtaining the views of the various stakeholder groups and the evaluators' ongoing requests for feedback at any stage may not have been the optimal approach. Meetings with individual representatives may have highlighted issues that were not discussed in the larger forum and this would have strengthened the evaluation.

### U2 Evaluator Credibility

#### Standard Statement

The persons conducting the evaluation should be both trustworthy and competent to perform the evaluation, so that the evaluation findings achieve maximum credibility and acceptance.

#### Judgment

This standard was satisfactorily addressed.

### Strengths of the Evaluation

1. The evaluation was conducted under the auspices of the Educational Research Centre, a national center for research of high standing for almost thirty years.

The qualifications and relevant experience of the evaluators were not questioned by either the National Steering Committee or by school staff. The previous teaching experience of the evaluation director further strengthened her credibility with school staff as someone who had experience of working in schools. The appointment of two reputable researchers to act as consultants to the evaluation was an additional strength.

2. The evaluation plan was clearly described to the Department of Education management group and to the National Steering Committee, as well as to the coordinators and principals (who were asked to convey this information to teachers). The reasons for the evaluation were also outlined for parents during any meetings with them.

#### Weaknesses of the Evaluation

1. A metaevaluation of the evaluation would have served to increase the credibility of the evaluation findings. This will be discussed under the A12 standard.

#### U3 Information Scope and Selection

##### Standard Statement

Information collected should be broadly selected to address pertinent questions about the program and be responsive to the needs and interests of clients and other specified stakeholders.

### **Judgment**

This standard was satisfactorily addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Client requirements for the evaluation were identified through meetings with Department personnel and through the National Steering Committee and the Committee “agreed that the evaluation plan covers all the issues” (minutes of January 25, 1991 meeting).

2. The collection of data from mothers who had not been successfully contacted by schools (i.e., uninvolved mothers) and the inclusion of data on their children’s scholastic achievements represented a more comprehensive approach than has generally been applied in similar studies (see Chapter X, p. 339).

3. During the second year, in response to continued requests from the National Steering Committee, achievement testing of pupils and pupils interviews were included as evaluation strategies and were carried out at that point.

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. The evaluation did not investigate the role and functioning of Local Committees in as much detail as originally planned. This was partly due to the fact that Local Committees did not become well established until the third year, when, due to scheme extensions in the second and third years, there was not sufficient time to

pursue further evaluation of this aspect of the scheme if the final report was to be delivered on time.

#### **U4 Values Identification**

##### **Standard Statement**

The perspectives, procedures, and rationale used to interpret the findings should be carefully described, so that the bases for value judgments are clear.

##### **Judgment**

This standard was partially addressed.

##### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. The main basis for the interpretation of findings in the evaluation was the scheme objectives (see Chapter III) and the evaluation conclusions and recommendations made an overall assessment of the scheme in relation to these objectives (see Chapter XI).

2. School staff were asked about their expectations for the scheme in terms of the needs they identified in schools. Their assessments of the extent to which HSCL met those needs were reported in the second annual report for the evaluation (on file at the Educational Research Centre).

### Weaknesses of the Evaluation

1. As with many evaluations, but particularly given the evolving nature of the HSCL scheme as well as the diversity of approaches within the scheme that were difficult to predict at the outset, the identification of relevant standards of performance against which to compare the scheme activities was problematic. In fact, while judgments were made for the purposes of this evaluation (e.g., ratings by the evaluation director and the National Coordinator described in Chapter IV), the evaluation did not establish any standards of performance for HSCL programs or any criteria by which to judge individual programs.

2. As the scheme developed, it became clear from discussions with stakeholders at national and local level that social and educational value perspectives were perceived to be most important in the interpretation of the evaluation findings. While coordinators were more focused on the social value of HSCL, teachers were more preoccupied with any impact it might have on their work, particularly in relation to dealing with problems. There was some discussion regarding the importance of economic value perspectives (particularly in relation to the decision for continued funding of the scheme) but an assessment of cost effectiveness of the scheme was not called for by the Department, nor was it encouraged by them.

No formal ranking of the value perspectives was carried out and judgments made for the evaluation were based solely on the evaluators' own value perspectives in light of the experience gleaned from the three years of the scheme and of reports of

similar programs elsewhere. Other than identifying what they viewed as strengths and weaknesses of HSCL, stakeholders were not involved in making value judgments about the scheme as a whole.

#### U5 Report Clarity

##### Standard Statement

Evaluation reports should clearly describe the program being evaluated, including its context, and the purposes, procedures, and findings of the evaluation, so that essential information is provided and easily understood.

##### Judgment

This standard was satisfactorily addressed.

##### Strengths of the Evaluation

1. Reports (oral and written) to the National Steering Committee were brief, simple, and direct, and addressed questions raised. These reports were given at each meeting (approximately every two months) and all questions from members were answered.

2. The Committee expressed satisfaction with the information provided in annual evaluation reports. For example, following the presentation and discussion of the first annual report the Committee agreed that “the evaluation report summarized



and made clear the activities [in the scheme] and was extremely useful in describing schools” (minutes of November 26, 1991 meeting).

3. Examples of practice were used throughout reports and, where technical language was required, it was explained. One example is the description of the analyses performed for the selection of the six schools (see Chapter IV, pp. 74-78).

4. Reports were geared towards the intended audiences (e.g., the Interim Evaluation Report which addressed issues relevant to pending decisions was prepared for internal use within the Department of Education; a Summary Evaluation Report was prepared for schools) and the final evaluation report contained an executive summary as well as chapter summaries (see copies on file in the Educational Research Centre).

5. The perceptions of all stakeholders were reported throughout the three years of the evaluation (see annual reports on file in the Educational Research Centre and Chapters VIII and IX of this dissertation).

6. The interim and final evaluation reports were reviewed by Department of Education personnel and by the National Steering Committee prior to general release.

#### Weaknesses of the Evaluation

1. No technical report was prepared for the evaluation. This will be discussed further under the accuracy domain.

2. The identification of possible areas for future study was limited to the recommendation for an overall evaluation of interventions in the system to combat disadvantage and an examination of how these interventions relate to each other. No suggestions were made regarding ongoing evaluation of the HSCL scheme or of an optimal time at which to revisit the evaluation of the scheme.

#### **U6 Report Timeliness and Dissemination**

##### **Standard Statement**

Significant interim findings and evaluation reports should be disseminated to intended users, so that they can be used in a timely fashion.

##### **Judgment**

The standard was partially addressed.

##### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Oral and written reports were issued to the National Steering Committee on a regular basis. Annual reports were issued on time each year. The Interim Evaluation Report was prepared at short notice and within the time line required for the information to be of use to decision makers.

2. Editorial control was maintained by the evaluators.

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. Dissemination of evaluation information to schools was limited during the three years of the evaluation. Annual evaluation reports documented both strengths and weaknesses of the scheme and Department of Education personnel were concerned that weaknesses in particular would be interpreted negatively or used in some way that would be harmful to the scheme. This issue is discussed further under the P2 Formal Agreements standard.

### **U7 Evaluation Impact**

#### **Standard Statement**

Evaluations should be planned, conducted, and reported in ways that encourage follow-through by stakeholders, so that the likelihood that the evaluation will be used is increased.

#### **Judgment**

This standard was satisfactorily addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Ongoing reporting of interim findings at all meetings of the National Steering Committee and were supplemented with ongoing discussion of issues raised by the Committee and suggestions regarding how to address the issues in question.

2. The Interim Evaluation Report was prepared in response to the identified need for information “to facilitate informed decision making by [Department of Education] management” (minutes of December 11, 1992 meeting). The report addressed issues identified by both Department personnel and the evaluators and identified the need for a more integrated approach between government departments to combat the problems of disadvantage. Based on their discussion of this report, the National Steering Committee agreed “that the Minister for Education should be asked to set up contact with other government departments to establish an integrated approach” (minutes of February 22, 1993 meeting, p.4). No information was made available, however, as to whether or not this actually occurred.

3. The Final Evaluation Report and the Summary Evaluation Report were made available through various channels following publication (e.g., through universities and other third-level institutions).

4. The Summary Evaluation Report was prepared for distribution to schools and other stakeholders and, as such, was directed at such an audience. Therefore, it highlighted the main findings of the evaluation and was presented in a format and language that was short (30 pages) and easy to read.

5. Because the HSCL scheme was such a new development in Irish education, the involvement of the evaluators from the inception of the scheme ensured that evaluative information was available throughout the course of the development phase of the scheme and could be used in a formative way to address difficulties and to encourage improvements. For example, in the first oral evaluation report presented to the National Steering Committee, principals' and teachers' lack of understanding of the goals and objectives of HSCL was highlighted as a weakness at that point. Based on the Committee's discussion of this finding, it was decided that there was a "need to define goals and to provide information for school staff" (minutes of March 1, 1991 meeting, p. 7). These information sessions were held during the second year of the scheme and developed into staff training sessions.

Another example of a response to formative evaluation information occurred as a result of evaluation findings that some representatives of statutory bodies (e.g., social workers, community police) were not cooperating fully with coordinators. The relevant representatives at National Steering Committee level undertook to ensure that information about the HSCL scheme would be disseminated within their organizations and that the importance of the involvement of community agencies and individuals in the scheme would be highlighted to the professionals in question.

6. The evaluation director was available at all times to discuss the evaluation findings, particularly with persons conducting further research and evaluation in this or related areas. Persons who consulted about the evaluation included personnel from

the Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise and Employment, as well as graduate students who were completing research on various aspects of the scheme as it operated within the education system.

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. The evaluators had no role in the application of evaluation findings or in any discussion of the merits of plausible alternative courses of action. Again, this relates to the P2 Formal Agreements standard and will be further discussed in that section.

### **F1 Practical Procedures**

#### **Standard Statement**

The evaluation procedures should be practical, to keep disruption to a minimum while needed information is obtained.

#### **Judgment**

This standard was satisfactorily addressed.

#### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Data collection did not cause disruption of program activities and was conducted with the full co-operation of all concerned. Site visits to schools were conducted with the cooperation of coordinators who, when necessary, liaised with

staff and parents so that evaluation activities could proceed as unobtrusively as possible (correspondences outlining these arrangements are on file in the Educational Research Centre).

2. Coordinators were harnessed as a source of data and the completion of progress records was included as part of their task. This was presented to them during their induction course and their agreement regarding the extent of the information that they would be prepared to provide was obtained. In the second year, this requirement was revised and reduced for all coordinators except those serving the six selected schools.

#### Weaknesses of the Evaluation

1. Coordination of data collection efforts of the evaluators and the National Coordinator could have been better planned but, for various reasons, one of which was the format of the information required, this did not occur.

2. Much of the data collected was qualitative and, subsequently, data analysis was time consuming. Given the evolving nature of the scheme, it is difficult to determine how this could have been reduced.

## **F2 Political Viability**

### **Standard Statement**

The evaluation should be planned and conducted with anticipation of the different positions of various interest groups, so that their cooperation may be obtained, and so that possible attempts by any of these groups to curtail evaluation operations or to bias or misapply the results can be averted or counteracted.

### **Judgment**

This standard was satisfactorily addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. There was ongoing communication with stakeholders at meetings of the National Steering Committee (see p. 54), at in service courses for coordinators, and at information meetings for principals and managers of schools.
2. The aims of the evaluation and an overview of the procedures to be used were explained to all stakeholders at the outset (see p. 54).
3. The involvement of the National Steering Committee in reviewing reports ensured that stakeholders were well aware of relevant issues prior to the publication of the final report (see p. 54).



4. The different perspectives (of coordinators, teachers, parents, principals, and pupils) were identified, reported, and assessed (see Chapters VIII and IX and annual evaluation reports).

5. The good working relationship between the Educational Research Centre and the Department of Education ensured that the evaluators had access to required data and control over editing reports, which was done in consultation with the Department of Education and the National Steering Committee.

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. The HSCL scheme had a very high profile within the education system and was launched amid very high expectations for its effectiveness. A political decision to extend the scheme (made by the Minister for Education during the first year of the scheme) preempted any evaluation findings on the scheme's implementation or effectiveness.

### **F3 Cost Effectiveness**

#### **Standard Statement**

The evaluation should be efficient and produce information of sufficient value, so that the resources expended can be justified.

### **Judgment**

This standard was satisfactorily addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. The evaluation was conducted economically and within the allocated budget and the amount spent on the evaluation was a reasonable proportion (about 10%) of overall program costs (see Chapter IV, p. 82). The National Steering Committee endorsed the budget for the evaluation and agreed that “ in the context of overall provision for the disadvantaged, the cost was not exceptional” (minutes of November 23, 1990 meeting, p. 2)
2. The evaluation team was small in relation to the scope of the information that was collected and the number of site visits and interviews that were conducted.
3. In the interest of cost effectiveness, detailed study of program operation was limited to six schools, as was the achievement testing of pupils, and the interview of mothers. Likewise, the number of pupils interviewed (12 in each of the six schools) was determined in light of time and financial constraints.

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

No weaknesses were identified in relation to this standard.

**P1 Service Orientation****Standard Statement**

Evaluations should be designed to assist organizations to address and effectively serve the needs of the full range of targeted participants.

**Judgment**

This standard was satisfactorily addressed.

**Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. All stakeholders were informed of the purposes of the evaluation (as described earlier) and evaluation efforts and resources were focused on the main features of the HSCL scheme (e.g., the provision of courses and activities for parents, parent involvement in schools, home visits) and included the perspectives of all stakeholders.
2. Feedback from the evaluation was provided in an attempt to promote excellence in the scheme and, to this end, interim findings citing strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement were reported to stakeholders through the National Steering Committee approximately every two months.

3. Program effects on learners, though this was a long-term aim of the scheme, were addressed through achievement testing of pupils and this was conducted with minimal use of instructional time.

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. Not all evaluation information was issued to stakeholders at school level since the Department of Education would not permit general release of annual evaluation reports. This is discussed further under the P2 Formal Agreements standard.

2. No needs assessment was conducted by the evaluators and so there was no attempt made to examine program effects against assessed needs of the targeted participants. The Mothers' Interview (described in Chapter IX) did, however, ask mothers about their reactions to the scheme.

### **P2 Formal Agreements**

#### **Standard Statement**

Obligations of the formal parties to an evaluation (what is to be done, how, by whom, when) should be agreed to in writing, so that these parties are obligated to adhere to all conditions of the agreement or formally to renegotiate it.

### **Judgment**

This standard was partially addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. The evaluation plan specified the purposes of the evaluation and the questions to be addressed, as well as a time line for the evaluation.
2. Data collection procedures, sampling, and data sources were described (see Chapters IV, IX, and X).
3. The evaluation was reviewed and modified at various stages. For example, the extension of the scheme at the end of the first year requires that the evaluation plan be modified to include additional schools. Another example was the inclusion of achievement data (see Chapter X) and pupil interviews (see Chapter VIII) as part of the evaluation.

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. The evaluation agreement did not meet all the requirements outlined in this standard (e.g., contract amendment and termination procedures, time line for work of both clients and evaluators, or details relating to anonymity of respondents, review of reports prior to their release, rebuttal by those being evaluated, and editorial and final release authority over completed reports).

The applicability of the entire details of this standard within the Irish system is open to question. In general, practices relating to the development of formal agreements within the Irish system are to a large extent dependent on the relationship between the parties (in this case the Department of Education and the Educational Research Centre) and are based more on custom than on contract. Since Irish society is not as litigious as that of the United States (though it is indeed becoming more so), to date, the informality of such agreements has not been problematic. This may change in the future, however.

Based on discussions at National Steering Committee level, the time line for the evaluation was understood to be three years, with further achievement testing of pupils to be conducted four years after the initial testing was completed.

The Educational Research Centre has been conducting work for the Department of Education for almost 30 years and on no occasion has there been a necessity for contract amendment and termination procedures to be outlined, nor has the lack of same proven to be problematic.

The issue regarding the control of release of any reports conducted for government departments is governed by the legal basis upon which these departments were established, this being the Ministers and Secretaries Act of 1924. Under this Act, the position of Minister was created as the “corporation sole” of the Department. Barrington (1980) explains the arrangement thus:

That is to say, the legal personality is the minister and the department is no more than an extension of that personality. Legal powers, with very few exceptions, are given to the minister and, to be validly exercised, must be performed by him or under his explicit direction (p. 31).

The minister therefore maintains ultimate control over government business and, therefore, the release of any departmental document must be approved by him or her.

### **P3 Rights of Human Subjects**

#### **Standard Statement**

Evaluations should be designed and conducted to respect and protect the rights and welfare of human subjects.

#### **Judgment**

This standard was satisfactorily addressed.

#### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. All individuals were informed of their intended participation in the evaluation. Meetings were held with principals and coordinators to discuss the evaluation. Discussions were also held with coordinators during their induction and in service courses. Principals were requested in correspondence to inform teachers about the various aspects of the evaluation in which they would be involved. Letters

outlining the mothers' interview were sent to mothers prior to the visit of the interviewer.

2. Communications used were appropriate and sensitive to the needs of the various parties (see correspondence on file at the Educational Research Centre). One example of this is the mothers' interview. Given the likelihood that some respondents were not literate, the decision was taken to collect this data by interview, even though this was considerably more costly than a postal survey would have been. Furthermore, great care was taken in formulating the questions so that they were easily understood and also so that none of the questions caused offence. In the field trial of the interview instrument, respondents confirmed that the questions were not objectionable in any way.

3. Confidentiality was maintained at all times (see p. 56). Neither individuals or schools were identified in reporting of evaluation information.

4. Data were used only for the intended purposes.

#### Aspects of the Standard That Were Not Applicable

1. No formal written agreements explaining procedures to ensure protection of the rights of participants was prepared. Work conducted at the Educational Research Centre always adheres to the highest ethical standards and the rights of human subjects have never been violated.



2. Since no human subjects committee exists in Ireland, it is not necessary to submit evaluation proposals for review by such a body.

3. Prior to conducting the achievement testing of pupils, principals were contacted regarding obtaining parents' permission. The general practice is that principals make contact with the parents regarding such matters and principals would not welcome the involvement of evaluators in this process.

#### **P4 Human Interactions**

##### **Standard Statement**

Evaluators should respect human dignity and worth in their interactions with other persons associated with an evaluation, so that participants are not threatened or harmed.

##### **Judgment**

This standard was satisfactorily addressed.

##### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Good communication with individuals and groups was maintained throughout the three years of the evaluation and the evaluators were available at all times, either by telephone or during visits to schools, to discuss any concerns that

arose. Relationships with schools never caused any difficulties. In fact, principals and staff were always very cooperative and welcoming to members of the evaluation team.

2. The initial fears of coordinators regarding the evaluation of their work were addressed and discussed at inservice courses and during site visits.

3. Evaluation findings were reported at a general level and in such a way that individuals or schools could not be identified or criticized (see reports).

4. Protocol in contacting and addressing participants was always maintained (see, for example, correspondence to participants; see P3 above). All participants were treated as of equal importance and always with the utmost respect.

5. Site visits to schools were always scheduled in consultation with school principals and coordinators (see correspondence) and, through liaison with coordinators, evaluation activities were conducted with minimal disruption in schools and in conjunction with the wishes of staff. On occasion, principals contacted the evaluators regarding rearrangement of plans and this was always accommodated.

#### Weaknesses of the Evaluation

No weaknesses were identified in relation to this standard.

**P5 Complete and Fair Assessment****Standard Statement**

The evaluation should be complete and fair in its examination and recording of strengths and weaknesses of the program being evaluated, so that strengths can be built upon and problem areas addressed.

**Judgment**

This standard was partially addressed.

**Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Strengths and weaknesses of the HSCL scheme were built into the evaluation design and were fully reported at all times (see annual evaluation reports). This was done in an attempt to provide information that would serve to strengthen the program.
2. Limitations of the evaluation and omissions in data were fully reported. No conclusions were reached that were not firmly grounded in evaluation information (see Chapter XI).
3. Evaluation methods were fully reported (see Chapters IV, IX, and X).

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. Very little attention was paid to the estimation of the effect of omissions of data on the overall judgment of the program.
2. More extensive documentation of evaluation methods and their limitations should have been provided, as will be further discussed in the accuracy domain.

### **P6 Disclosure of Findings**

#### **Standard Statement**

The formal parties to an evaluation should ensure that the full set of evaluation findings along with pertinent limitations are made accessible to the persons affected by the evaluation, and any others with expressed legal rights to receive the results.

#### **Judgment**

This standard was partially addressed.

#### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Evaluation information was reported completely (both orally and in writing) and there were no omissions or alterations of findings. This is in keeping with the tradition of work conducted at the Educational Research Centre.

2. All perspectives, both positive and negative, as well as suggestions for improvement, were presented in evaluation reports (see for example, evaluation report to the March 1, 1991 meeting of the National Steering Committee which dealt solely with these issues as described by school personnel).

3. Interim reports were provided as required (see U6 standard).

4. Editing of evaluation reports was controlled by the evaluators (p. 53).

#### Weaknesses of the Evaluation

1. The basis for the perceived relationships between evaluation purposes, methods used, data collected, and findings could have been more clearly delineated.

2. More comprehensive dissemination of evaluation information should have occurred, particularly that information which would have been of use to coordinators in their ongoing implementation of the scheme. Some discussion at the outset with the Department of Education over the release of such information might have helped in this area of the evaluation.

#### Aspects of the Standard That Were Not Applicable

No formal agreement regarding the release of evaluation reports was made. As discussed earlier (see P2 standard), this is related to the statutory basis of the Department of Education. A related issue is that of communication and information between the government and the public, for which two different traditions operate

within the Irish system. The proceedings of the Houses of the Oireachtas (legislature) are fully reported as are the proceedings of local councils. Similarly, with some exceptions, the courts are conducted in public and, in significant matters, judges provide written judgments and reasons for these judgments which are subsequently published (Barrington, 1980).

On the other hand, the operations within government departments are almost entirely beyond public scrutiny and “we know about what goes on within them only in so far as a conscious decision is taken to publish a decision or a report, often presented as a remarkable act of magnanimity on the part of the body concerned” (Barrington, pp. 191-192). Therefore, compliance with this aspect of the standard would be problematic in the Irish context. Given current development of legislation concerning the public’s right to know, it is likely that this position will change in the near future.

#### P7 Conflict of Interest

##### Standard Statement

Conflict of interest should be dealt with openly and honestly, so that it does not compromise the evaluation processes and results.

##### Judgment

This standard was satisfactorily addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. The evaluation was conducted by the Educational Research Centre which is an independent research organization and therefore did not have any vested interests in the HSCL scheme.

2. The agreement to conduct the evaluation was made directly with the funding agency for the scheme (i.e., the Department of Education) and not with schools or coordinators who had important issues at stake (e.g., funding, professional reputation).

3. The advice of the National Steering Committee was sought in order to enhance the design of the evaluation as well as to provide a checking process for the evaluation and for the development of reports.

4. The interests of various parties were considered throughout the evaluation, both through their involvement at National Steering Committee level and through their contributions at school level.

5. Evaluation reports were reviewed by the National Steering Committee and final reports were released to the public to be judged by other professionals.

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. The release of evaluation reports and information was subject to the approval of the Department of Education as discussed earlier (see P2 standard).

## **P8 Fiscal Responsibility**

### **Standard Statement**

The evaluator's allocation and expenditure of resources should reflect sound accountability procedures and otherwise be prudent and ethically responsible, so that expenditures are accounted for and appropriate.

### **Judgment**

This standard was satisfactorily addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Budgets for the evaluation were prepared and presented to Department of Education management personnel and to the National Steering Committee (see F3 standard). Responsible procedures were followed in relation to financial budgeting and control as well as personnel matters in accordance with usual working practices within the Educational Research Centre. All materials relating to these matters, including accurate records of expenditure, are on file at the Centre as required by law and are subject to audit.

2. Resources were expended in a responsible and frugal manner, while at the same time allowing flexibility for reallocation of funds where this was necessary to allow successful completion of evaluation tasks (see Chapter IV and F3 standard).



### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

No weaknesses were identified in relation to this standard.

## **A1 Program Documentation**

### **Standard Statement**

The program being evaluated should be described and documented clearly and accurately, so that the program is clearly identified.

### **Judgment**

The standard was partially addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. During the first year of the scheme, one of the main evaluation tasks was to document scheme development and activities in 56 schools. The main source of this information was the Progress Records completed by the coordinators and this was supplemented by site visits (see pp. 59-60; Chapters VI and VII; and annual evaluation reports).
2. Since the scheme was so new and its focus was deliberately vague in order to allow diversity of approach, the task of designing data collection instruments and procedures that would be sensitive to all aspects of the scheme's development was a

challenging one. Over the course of the three-year evaluation, the instruments were adapted so that they would be in line with scheme developments (see Chapter IV).

3. The National Coordinator, who had closer contact than the evaluators with all schools in the scheme, reviewed evaluation reports for accuracy of information.

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. Because resources (time, finances, personnel) for the evaluation were limited, and because the scheme was extended to include additional schools at the end of both the first and second years, it was impossible to maintain monitoring of the scheme in all sites and it became necessary to focus intensified evaluation activities to six selected schools (see Chapter IV). More general information was gathered from schools that were in the scheme during the first two years only and schools that entered the scheme during the third year were not included.

The six schools were not intended to be representative of the scheme as a whole, but rather to present examples of issues involved in implementation. Based on discussions with the National Coordinator (who had closer contact with the other schools in the scheme), Department of Education personnel, and the National Steering Committee, the evaluators were satisfied that the issues covered in the study of the six schools included those most salient to the scheme. There were some developments during the third year, however, e.g., the training of parents as home visitors, that occurred in other schools that were not included in the evaluation.

## **A2 Context Analysis**

### **Standard Statement**

The context in which the program exists should be examined in enough detail, so that its likely influences on the program can be identified.

### **Judgment**

The standard was partially addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Various aspects of the context of the scheme were described throughout evaluation reports (e.g., school-parent communication, p. 58; centralized system of policy and program formulation, p. 88; relationships between parents and staff, p. 88; introduction of HSCL by the Department of Education, p. 89).

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. The context analysis that was provided in the evaluation report was limited and a more detailed description could have been provided. Through their membership on the National Steering Committee, all stakeholders at national level had been closely involved in scheme development and evaluation and so were with the context of issues

as they arose. It was therefore not a priority to provide a context analysis for that audience. Such an analysis would have been of value to other readers.

### **A3 Described Purposes and Procedures**

#### **Standard Statement**

The purposes and procedures of the evaluation should be monitored and described in enough detail, so that they can be identified and assessed.

#### **Judgment**

The standard was partially addressed.

#### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. The purposes of the evaluation and intended uses of the findings (see p. 51) were thoroughly discussed with the Department of Education management team and with the National Steering Committee at the outset and on an ongoing basis (see standards P1, U1, and U7).

2. The evaluation plan was also discussed and agreed with the Department and the Committee, as well as with local coordinators and principals (see standard F2) and is on file at the Educational Research Centre.

3. Data collection approaches were outlined to the National Steering Committee and to Department of Education personnel on an ongoing basis and were also discussed with coordinators (see Chapter IV and standard F2).

### Weaknesses of the Evaluation

1. No technical report was prepared that described data collection instruments, rationale for selection of procedures for data collection and analysis, and details of the type and extent of reliability claimed for data collection instruments. Stufflebeam (cited in Dodson, 1994) stated, "As practicing evaluators know, it is regularly important to prepare a detailed technical report for evaluation. Although almost nobody ever does more with the report than to check on whether or not it exists. Almost no one will read the technical report, woe onto the evaluator who doesn't have one available as a defense mechanism."

While this is the case in the United States, the more common practice in Ireland is that, should further details relating to technical aspects of an evaluation report be required, the evaluators are requested to provide these.

2. The lack of an external metaevaluation process will be discussed under the A12 standard.

#### **A4 Defensible Information Sources**

##### **Standard Statement**

The sources of information used in a program evaluation should be monitored and described in enough detail, so that the adequacy of the information can be assessed.

##### **Judgment**

The standard was satisfactorily addressed.

##### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Sampling and selection procedures were described in detail. For example the selection of the six schools was described in detail in Chapter IV, the sampling of mothers for interview was described in Chapter IX).
2. Sources of information and information collection procedures were described in detail (see Chapter IV) and copies of instruments are available from files at the Educational Research Centre.
3. The merits of both quantitative and qualitative data were valued equally and chosen as appropriate for various aspects of the evaluation. Qualitative information was used mainly in the description of scheme activities and implementation (see Chapters VI and VII) since this was diverse and difficult to predict at the outset of the

evaluation. In assessing scheme effects, qualitative information from various stakeholders was also considered to be important (see Chapter VIII).

Where possible, quantitative analyses were also included. See, for example, the description of schools prior to the HSCL scheme (Chapter V), descriptions of characteristics of mothers (Chapter IX), descriptions of pupil achievements (Chapter X), and analyses of the relationships between mothers' characteristics and pupil achievements (Chapter X).

4. As far as possible, a good rapport was established with stakeholders, particularly at school level, and they were encouraged to be frank in their discussions and in their descriptions of positive and negative aspects of the scheme (see p. 56).

#### Weaknesses of the Evaluation

1. The lack of a technical report (as described under the A3 standard) was a weakness for this standard also.

### A5 Valid Information

#### Standard Statement

The information gathering procedures should be chosen or developed and then implemented so that they will assure that the interpretation arrived at is valid for the intended use.

### **Judgment**

The standard was partially addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. All data collection instruments (with the exception of the achievement tests) were designed specifically for the study in question and the information collected was responsive to the developing nature of the scheme and evolved accordingly (see Chapter IV).
2. All evaluation personnel were qualified and adequately prepared to administer and use the relevant procedures (see Chapters IV and IX).
3. Multiple procedures (i.e., interview, self-report, standardized achievement tests, observation) were used and triangulation of data was built in to the design (e.g., various stakeholders were asked about the same issues (see Chapter IV).
4. In developing instruments, the characteristics of respondents were considered (e.g., literacy difficulties of some mothers led to the decision to use an interview approach with mothers and influenced the wording of questions in the instrument see standard P4).
5. Meaningful categories of information were identified (see, for example, the description of the analyses for the selection of the six schools in Chapter IV) and recurrent issues were documented over the three years of the evaluation (see Chapters VI, VII, and VIII).



### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. The rationale for the selection of various evaluation procedures was not described and evidence supporting the use of each methodology was not provided in a separate technical report (see standard A3).
2. Additional systematic checks (e.g., site visits to a sample of schools) on the validity of information provided by the coordinators would have added to the checks that were in place (i.e., discussions with the National Coordinator).

### **A6 Reliable Information**

#### **Standard Statement**

The information gathering procedures should be chosen or developed and then implemented so that they will assure that the information obtained is sufficiently reliable for the intended use.

#### **Judgment**

The standard was satisfactorily addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Where possible, information gathering instruments that had previously yielded reliable data were used. See, for example, descriptions of the achievement tests (Chapter X) and sources of questions used in the mothers' interview (Table 29).
2. Scoring, categorization, and coding of open-ended information was conducted in the appropriate manner and in accordance with procedures used at the Educational Research Centre.
3. Data coders were given appropriate training and instruction to enable them to carry out their tasks and random checks on the coding process were conducted by member of the evaluation team and by the evaluation director. Data analyses were conducted by members of the evaluation team who had experience in this area. Where more complex analyses (e.g., cluster analysis for the selection of six schools) were called for, these were conducted by statisticians at the Educational Research Centre.
4. All relevant information was considered in making interpretations and in drawing conclusions about the scheme.

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. No rationale for the types of reliability claimed or of the extent of this reliability was presented in a technical report (see standard A3).

## **A7 Systematic Information**

### **Standard Statement**

The information collected, processed, and reported in an evaluation should be systematically reviewed and any errors found should be corrected.

### **Judgment**

The standard was satisfactorily addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Data were checked systematically at all stages (collection, coding, data entry, storing and retrieval of data, analysis, and reporting) in accordance with procedures followed at the Educational Research Centre.
2. All evaluation information and results were controlled by the evaluators so that the integrity of the information was protected at all times.
3. Multiple sources of information (described in Chapter IV) provided a built-in check on the accuracy of information.

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. Further checks (as described for standard A5) would have further strengthened this aspect of the evaluation.

## **A8 Analysis of Quantitative Information**

### **Standard Statement**

Quantitative information in an evaluation should be appropriately and systematically analyzed so that evaluation questions are effectively answered.

### **Judgment**

The standard was satisfactorily addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Appropriate analyses were used throughout the evaluation (see annual reports and Chapters IX and X).
2. Inferences and conclusions were made in consideration of the practical, as well as statistical, significance of findings (see Chapters IX, X, and XI).
3. The complementarity of quantitative and qualitative data was recognized and interpretations and conclusions were supported by both (see standard A4).

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

No weaknesses were identified in relation to this standard.

## **A9 Analysis of Qualitative Information**

### **Standard Statement**

Qualitative information in an evaluation should be appropriately and systematically analyzed so that evaluation questions are effectively answered.

### **Judgment**

The standard was satisfactorily addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. The questions used in data collection were clear and focussed on issues of interest (see Chapter IV; standards U3 and A4).
2. Communication with stakeholders was maintained and the National Coordinator was consulted so that accuracy of analyses could be checked (see standards A5 and A6).
3. Multiple sources of information were used (see Chapter IV) and multiple value perspectives of stakeholders were considered (see standard U4).

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

No weaknesses in relation to this standard were identified.

### **A10 Justified Conclusions**

#### **Standard Statement**

The conclusions reached in an evaluation should be explicitly justified, so that stakeholders can assess them.

#### **Judgment**

The standard was satisfactorily addressed.

#### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Evaluation conclusions were limited to purposes, situations, time periods, and contexts to which the evaluation findings applied and were related to data provided in the report (see Chapters VI-XI).
2. As far as possible, alternative explanations for the findings were explored and reported and limitations of the data and procedures were considered in answering evaluation questions (see Chapters VI-XI).
3. Prior to the release of evaluation reports, feedback on credibility of findings and recommendations was sought from Department of Education personnel and the National Steering Committee and this was considered in producing the final report (see standards U6 and U7).

### **Weaknesses of the Evaluation**

1. More detailed description of the limitations of the evaluation should have been provided (see standard A3).

### **A11 Impartial Reporting**

#### **Standard Statement**

Reporting procedures should guard against distortion caused by personal feelings and biases of any party to the evaluation, so that evaluation reports fairly reflect the evaluation findings.

#### **Judgment**

The standard was satisfactorily addressed.

### **Strengths of the Evaluation**

1. Various alternative perspectives (besides those of coordinators whose work was being evaluated) were reported at all stages of the evaluation (see Chapter VIII annual evaluation reports) and through ongoing feedback between the scheme developer (in this case the Department of Education management team) and the evaluators.

2. Editing of reports was controlled by the evaluators and information was collected by a number of different evaluation team members at various stages throughout the evaluation.

### Weaknesses of the Evaluation

1. The evaluation of scheme effectiveness relied heavily on the self-report data provided by coordinators which was supplemented as much as possible by data from other sources (see Chapter IV).

### A12 Metaevaluation

#### Standard Statement

The evaluation itself should be formatively and summatively evaluated against these and other pertinent standards, so that its conduct is appropriately guided and, on completion, stakeholders can closely examine its strengths and weaknesses.

#### Judgment

The standard was satisfactorily addressed.

#### Strengths of the Evaluation

1. The National Coordinator, Department of Education personnel, and the National Steering Committee discussed all aspects of the evaluation throughout the



three years and approved the evaluation plan and ongoing procedures and reports (see standards U3, U5, U6, U7, and P1).

2. The evaluation study was carefully and thoroughly documented in this dissertation.

3. The application of the Joint Committee program evaluation standards to the HSCL evaluation in this chapter constitutes a metaevaluation of the study.

4. The public oral examination and defense of the study by the author is a further strength in this area.

5. The study outlined in this dissertation was reviewed and endorsed by the three members of the doctoral committee.

#### Weaknesses of the Evaluation

1. No external metaevaluation of the evaluation was carried out, though the evaluation was continually evaluated internally. While the views of other professionals were sought during the planning stages, further guidance during implementation would have been valuable. The extent to which a formal metaevaluation would have added to the credibility of evaluation findings and recommendations is difficult to determine but the assumption is that it would have been of some benefit.

## Conclusion

The evaluation of the HSCL scheme addressed all of the Joint Committee standards at least to some extent. All of the standards were found to apply as principles of sound evaluation in the Irish context. Difficulties arose in relation mainly to the propriety standards, and, particularly in relation to standard requirements that were specific to the litigious nature of practices within the United States. In general, however, the application of the Joint Committee standards served to identify aspects of the evaluation that were adequate, as well as aspects that could have been given further attention.

## CHAPTER XIII

### SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The policies of successive Irish governments since the 1960s have been supportive of the principle of equality of educational opportunity. To this end, a number of educational initiatives to address the problems of social and economic disadvantage have been put in place over the years. These initiatives have, by and large, operated independently and in isolation from each other.

Research in Ireland and elsewhere has clearly established the relationships between home background factors and educational achievement and, specifically, the importance of parents' roles in children's learning. Both parents and children have been found to benefit from initiatives that emphasize the development of close ties between homes and schools.

The HSCL scheme was established by the Irish Department of Education to increase the involvement of parents in their children's education. Schools in areas designated as disadvantaged were targeted for the intervention. The scheme was directed by a National Coordinator who worked closely with coordinators at local level.

Inservice courses and meetings with coordinators, principals and inspectors, and school staff were provided as support for the implementation of the scheme. The

National Steering Committee, comprised of representatives of various stakeholder groups, was established to advise on all aspects of the HSCL scheme, including the evaluation. At local level, Local Committees whose membership was made up of parents and representatives of community agencies and individuals were intended to determine program focus based on identified needs.

The Educational Research Centre was commissioned to conduct the evaluation of the scheme during its first three years. Much of the evaluation effort was directed towards the formation and development of programs and evaluation strategies were modified as the programs developed. Sources of information for the evaluation included coordinators, principals, teachers, pupils, and parents and data was obtained through questionnaires, interviews, and standardized achievement tests. Due to the extension of the scheme in the second year, six schools were selected for more detailed study during subsequent years. However, some information was also obtained from all other schools in the scheme.

Prior to the introduction of the HSCL scheme, some basic structures to deal with home-school relationships were in place in all schools. Some schools had relatively few structures and all probably needed to expand the range of activities in which they were engaged. The structures were mainly related to school governance and communication between school and home. Parents were also involved in some schools in extra-curricular activities. Parents had little involvement in situations closer to the learning-teaching situation (either at home or at school). Involvement by schools with community organizations was not common.

### HSCL Activities

On average, coordinators devoted most of their time (almost a third) to courses and activities for parents (mostly mothers). The most popular courses and activities during the second and third years were related directly to children's education. Other popular courses and activities included those to develop parents, parenting courses, and courses and activities in home management.

Small numbers of parents in some schools organized activities such as swimming for children and others helped with school events. Parents in some schools managed structures for HSCL programs (e.g., parents' room, day care center), and parents were also members of school governance committees. In some schools, parents assisted in classrooms with reading, writing, math, and art and craft, though this involvement was confined almost exclusively to the first four grade levels.

The community aspect of HSCL hinged on three aspects of coordinators' work: home visits, Local Committees, and contacts with community agencies and individuals.

Home visits were perceived as central to the scheme, mainly as a strategy to build relationships with parents and to reach parents who had no other contact with the school (including those identified by teachers).

A major problem in developing Local Committees seems to have been a lack of understanding of the role and function of the committee. By the third year, local committees had been set up to serve just under half the schools. Factors identified by

coordinators as having contributed to the success of these committees were parent awareness of HSCL, support from the principal, degree of cooperation and effort of committee members, and community awareness of HSCL.

Coordinators contacted a wide variety of community agencies and individuals and the pattern of contacts changed throughout the three years. The most valued contributions were judged by coordinators to have come from agencies which one would expect to provide services relating to the long-term development of parents and communities. Agencies concerned with the economic and social development of local areas were also ranked as contributing to HSCL.

### HSCL Effects

The availability of the coordinator as a resource to liaise with parents and the community outside the school was perceived as a major advantage of the HSCL scheme. In most schools, increased contact occurred between parents and teachers and there tended to be less conflict and greater cooperation and consultation on school issues. In more than half the schools, changes were made in school organization to accommodate and facilitate parent activities.

At least some teachers in most schools were perceived by coordinators to have become more positive towards parental involvement in schools, to have an increased understanding of the difficulties parents faced, and a greater appreciation of parents' talents and abilities. Teachers found that parents had become easier to contact and problems easier to deal with.

There was great variance among teachers in their attitudes to parent involvement in the classroom and the form such involvement should take. In general, they agreed that the role of parents, particularly in the classroom, needed to be well thought-out and structured, and developed with input from teachers.

Coordinators attributed most of the effects on parents' personal development to parent participation in courses. Teachers, on the other hand, concentrated mostly on effects as they related to parent involvement in classroom-based activities or to teachers' general contacts with parents.

While the effects described on parents were of a very positive nature, it must be noted that they were generally confined to parents who were involved in program activities and whom teachers often regarded as being least in need of the HSCL scheme. Initiatives were perceived to be necessary to encourage the involvement of all parents, particularly those whose needs seemed greatest.

The reason most frequently given by mothers for getting involved in activities in their child's school was to become more involved in the education of their child. Parents who had helped the teacher in the classroom found this activity more beneficial in terms of their becoming involved in the education of their child than parents who had been involved in courses.

Participation in courses has its own benefits, however, particularly in terms of helping parents to get to know other parents and in building parent confidence. Interview responses gave some insight into the reasons for inconsistent attendance at courses, the main reason being family duties. This points to the importance of a

support system for mothers in encouraging them to attend courses by accommodating and supporting them in their family duties as much as possible (e.g., through the provision of child care facilities).

The finding that few parents appear to have taken a leading role in parent activities indicates a need to develop leadership qualities among parents. The presence of parents as leaders, while seen less frequently as a positive development by uninvolved compared to involved mothers, could, perhaps, become one of the ways of encouraging more parents to become involved in HSCL programs in the schools.

Although effects on children would be expected to be a more long-term outcome of the scheme, both coordinators and teachers reported that the HSCL scheme had some effects on children, mostly in terms of children developing a more positive attitude towards school and teachers, towards themselves, and towards their parents.

Overall review of the operation of HSCL programs in their first two or three years of operation in schools indicates that a considerable amount of activity was generated in schools. It seems reasonable to conclude on the basis of such activities and of the reactions of all involved in HSCL liaison programs--coordinators, parents, and teachers--that a major start had been made in meeting one of the aims of the scheme--to promote active cooperation between home and school.

There is also some evidence that movement had occurred towards the achievement of a second aim of the scheme--to raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in



developing relevant skills. This conclusion may be inferred from observations that some parents had increased in self-confidence, knew more about what was happening in school, and had learned how to help their children with school work.

Judging the extent to which another aim of the project--to enhance the active participation of children in the learning process, in particular those that might be at risk of failure--was achieved is more problematic since effects on pupil achievement of a project such as the HSCL scheme would be likely to be long-term rather than short-term. There will be an opportunity in a few years time to compare the scholastic achievements of students in participating schools with achievements at the inception of the scheme. At this stage, we can only comment on the likelihood that the type of programs that have been implemented will be found to have impacted on students' scholastic progress.

Reference in the aims of the HSCL scheme to meeting the needs of children considered to be most at risk prompts an examination of the characteristics of "involved" and "non-involved" mothers. In the survey of mothers, it was found that those identified as uninvolved and in need of help were in fact in need of greater support in the task of enhancing the educational environment of their children than were parents who were actively involved in programs. The fact that coordinators were aware of this problem and sought to address it by visiting a greater proportion of such uninvolved homes should serve to underline the intractable nature of the problem of involving such parents. While one cannot discount the possibility that further visits or networking of parents will produce a more positive response in the future, neither

can one be sure that this will be the case. At this stage, a search for alternative strategies would seem in order. These might involve more intensive work in the home with mothers.

There is a reference to the community-based aspect of the scheme in only one of the aims and that is limited to enhancing "active cooperation between home, school, and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children." In evaluating the effectiveness of the HSCL programs in achieving the aim regarding community involvement, it is necessary to distinguish two types of community-based programs. One recognizes that since many agencies besides the family play a role in supporting child development, partnership with a variety of formal and informal social systems and organizations may be necessary to create optimal conditions for children's development. The other type of program, recognizing that the problems of disadvantage very often have their origins in the conditions of the communities in which families live, communities that may lack services, organization, and leadership, see development of the community itself as a prerequisite to sustaining the effects of any intervention that may be implemented to support children's development. Both the aim of the scheme and the way in which programs have developed suggest that the former type of programme is what was envisaged in the HSCL scheme. If this is so, programs may be regarded as having met the scheme's aim insofar as many coordinators have been successful in establishing links with relevant community agencies. The extension and development of Local Committees should serve to further facilitate this work.

Finally, we may consider the extent to which programs have been successful in bringing schools to the point that they provide a more appropriate educational environment for children. There is no doubt that schools have changed. They are more accommodating of parents, are providing a wide range of services for them, and are allowing them to participate more actively in the work of the school and of classrooms. One might expect this trend to continue until all teachers have some involvement in home-school programs. It seems unlikely, however, given the constraints under which schools operate that radical changes will occur in their organization and functioning.

### Conclusion

Even if radical changes in the organization and functioning of schools are not to be expected, it does, however, seem appropriate to explore further how schools, under present constraints, are dealing with problems of disadvantage. There have been several initiatives at the national level designed to deal with disadvantage which have allowed schools to purchase materials, to reduce class size, and to provide remedial and psychological services. However, these initiatives have so far either been evaluated in isolation or not at all. It would seem appropriate at this stage to examine the impact of the variety of measures that have been taken from the point of view of individual schools. Now that HSCL programs, together with other programs, are well-established in schools, such an examination should provide useful information for policy decisions on the relative effectiveness of existing measures as well as on the

possible need for other approaches to deal with the problems of disadvantage. While it would be unrealistic to expect individual initiatives such as the HSCL scheme to solve the problems of disadvantage, it may not be unrealistic to expect that a combination of approaches would serve to alleviate them. There is already evidence from elsewhere that such a combination would be likely to be more effective than single-focus strategies.

The evaluation of the HSCL scheme addressed all but one (A12) of the Joint Committee standards at least to some extent. All of the standards were found to apply as principles of sound evaluation in the Irish context. Difficulties arose in relation mainly to the propriety standards, and, particularly in relation to standard requirements that were specific to the litigious nature of practices within the United States. In general, however, the application of the Joint Committee standards served to identify aspects of the evaluation that were adequate, as well as aspects that could have been given further attention.

**Apppendix A**  
**Permission to Use Data**

February 28, 1996

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United States of America

Dear Ms Scrivener,

I am writing to you in regard to the dissertation that has been completed by Sandra Ryan. The data used in the dissertation were secondary data from an evaluation study carried out at the Educational Research Centre, a national centre for research in Ireland for over 30 years.

The study was designed to provide information to a wide range of audiences, including policy makers, researchers, and school personnel, about the implementation and effects of a Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) programme. The input of representatives of these audiences was sought in deciding what information was required and the information collected was limited to that which would prove useful for the purposes of the study.

Throughout all stages of the study, participants (school personnel and parents) were informed of the purposes of the research and their co-operation was sought. School principals gained parents' permission for the administration of achievement tests (in reading and mathematics) to their children with the understanding that the test results would be made available to the principal and the class teacher. Relevant correspondence and other records relating to this aspect of the evaluation are on file in the Educational Research Centre and may be examined at any time.

The guarantee of confidentiality of the data was central to the data collection process and was maintained at all stages of the work. Evaluation reports protected the identities of both individual respondents and schools as part of this agreement. The reports themselves provide evidence of this and may also be examined if necessary.

The information from school personnel related to their perceptions of the HSCL programme and its implementation in their school. Parents were also asked to give their views about various aspects of the programme and also provided some data about their attitudes to education, their educational practices in the home, and some demographic information (family size, occupation, level of education, and structure of household).

Data collection procedures, including the design of instrumentation, sampling design, data entry and analysis, were in accordance with the standards of practice that govern the work of the Educational Research Centre and drew on the relevant expertise of various members of staff. Relevant documentation and records are on file in the Educational Research Centre.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Kellaghan". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Thomas Kellaghan  
Director

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