

# The Enactment of Key Skills

## *A Comparative Case-Study of two Junior Cycle Schools in Ireland*

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MA of Philosophy in Comparative and International Education  
Department for Educational Sciences

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# Abstract

There has been an emergence of competence and skills-based school reforms and frameworks in the last twenty years, especially in the western world. Although the terms “skills” and “competencies” have been around since the 1970’s, it was primarily associated with vocational learning and training. In recent years however, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills has been bookmarked by transnational organizations such as the OECD and UNESCO, as well as the EU, to meet the demands of our knowledge society and is used by a broad range of education institutions. Ireland is one of the countries at the fore front of skills-based learning. The Irish National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA] and the Irish Department for Education and Skills have participated in multiple international collaborations for the development of skills in educational policy and teaching. In 2015 an Irish school reform was initiated, bringing in changes to the National Curriculum for Junior Cycle (lower secondary) and a Key Skills Framework was introduced – a set of six generic skills. As an education system is only as good as its local actors, this study is set out to explore how two local Irish Junior Cycle have implemented the framework.

This study uses a qualitative comparative design and is a multiple-case study. The primary focus was on teachers and principals’ perceptions and knowledge. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The analysis has been guided by a qualitative content analysis as well as an ideational analysis based on two ideal types that were drafted using the analytical framework of this study.

The main findings indicate that the generic skills of the Key Skills Framework are better suited to some subjects than others. Science in particular came through as highly accommodative for skills-based learning. Different Key Skills initiatives were present at the schools; software technology to assess the Key Skills and interdisciplinary subjects. Furthermore, participants identified three types of accountability within the use of Key Skills; personal, professional and public accountability. These findings point to a direction of post-bureaucracy in Irish education and are discussed thoroughly throughout the thesis.



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# Acronyms

ASTI – Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland

CEDEFOP – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

DD-DO – Different Systems – Different Outcomes (acronyms for comparative research)

DeSeCo – Definition and Selection of Competences

EU – The European Union

KeyCoNet – European Policy Network on Key Competences in School Education

KS – Key Skills

NCCA – National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

NPM – New Public Management

NSD – Norwegian Social Science Data Services

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

P21 – Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning

PE – Physical Education

PISA – Program for International Student Assessment

SS-DO – Similar Systems – Different Outcomes (acronyms for comparative research)

STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (school subject)

UNESCO – United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Significance of the Study

The emergence of the knowledge society and new models of economic and social developments has urged governments, policy makers, researchers, organizations, teachers and other experts to define what knowledge is needed in a fast-paced present – and future world. The terms “skills” and “competencies” have surfaced in the last twenty years to be prominent signifiers of the knowledge society in the western world of education. Early references of competencies can be traced back to France in the 1970s where it was used to describe qualifications for employers to work effectively (Grayson, 2014). In the 1980s, the term competence was used primarily for vocational education and training (Grayson, 2014). Today these two terms can be found across educational institutions and are often related to the broader category of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. Major transnational organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] and the United Nations’ Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], as well as the European Union [EU] have since the 1990’s been dominant in policy recommendations concerning 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. Many have attempted to define the term, such as the OECD:

*“Those skills and competencies young people will be required to have in order to be effective workers and citizens in the knowledge society of the 21st century” (OECD, 2009, p.8).*

In 1994, the OECD published a report urging for curricula to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and mentioned knowledge, competencies and values as important (OECD, 1994). In 1997, the OECD compiled the DeSeCo report; “Definition and Selection of Competences”, a report that commented on the lack of an “overarching conceptual framework based on broad theories of what skills, knowledge, and competencies are and how they relate to each other” (OECD, n.d.a, para.7). Below is a model from the DeSeCo report (figure 1), with three overarching, interrelated categories. These three categories of key-competencies have been identified on background of the demands of modern life, individual – and global challenges. The Program for International Student Assessment [PISA], also distributed by the OECD, is a triennial test for 15-year-old-students worldwide (OECD, n.d.b). The first PISA test was initiated in 2000, and the aim of each PISA test is to test the student’s ability to use their skills and competencies in everyday-and working life.

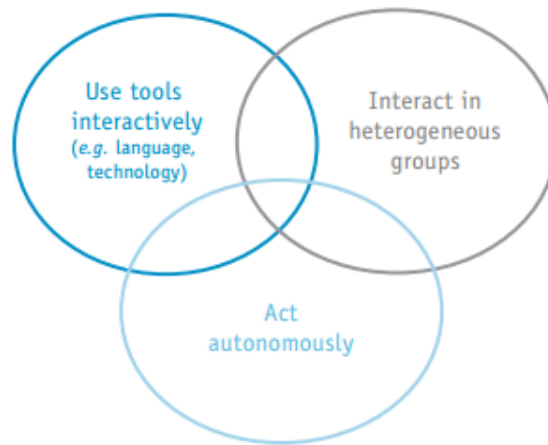


Figure 1: Key Competencies in Three Broad Categories. By the OECD. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/35070367.pdf>

UNESCO published the report “Learning: The Treasure Within” in 1996. The report describes a fast-paced society where people need to adapt quickly to changes, have a great sense of responsibility and develop understanding for each other. Four pillars were identified: learning to live together, learning to do, learning to know and learning to be (UNESCO, 1996). This report resembles the philosophy of the UNESCO institute for Lifelong Learning (previously named Institute for Education), that since 1972 has had lifelong education as an agenda (UNESCO, 1996). UNESCO has in later years continued the work for global citizenship education and published the report “Global Citizenship Education” in 2014 (UNESCO, 2014). This report aims to prepare students for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The European Commission under the European Union, developed the framework Key Competences in 2006, with eight competencies such as communication in mother tongue, communication in foreign language, social and civic competencies, learning to learn and digital competence (The European Parliament, 2006). This framework is directly inspired by the DeSeCo report (Erstad, O., Amdam, S., Arnseth, H. C., Silseth, K., n.d.), and the Lisbon Agenda (Halász & Michel, 2011) that in 2000 commented on the importance of key competencies.

Despite the tremendous attention given to skills and competencies, there is still no global agreement of what exactly these concepts are, what they entitle or how one should work to achieve them (OECD, 2009; Halász and Michel, 2011; Steiner-Khamsi, 2014; Grayson, 2014). It may seem as the concept of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills is out there and exists, but no one can seem to grasp their full meaning. Many of the frameworks of skills and competencies available vary in definition and focus, although many mention similar generic skills such as critical thinking,

adaptability and digital literacy. Competencies and skills are seemingly breaking from the 20<sup>th</sup> century style of transmission of knowledge into disciplines and are not tied to any specific subject or subject area (Grayson, 2014; Yates and Young, 2010). In the EU, most member states have explicitly adopted competencies and skills in to their curricula, most of them drawing from OECD reports and the EU Framework for Key Competences (Grayson, 2014). How they have been adopted though, varies:

Way of framing	EU member states
Skills or competence-based	Cyprus, Germany, <b>Ireland</b> , Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, United Kingdom
Subject-based	Bulgaria, Italy, Malta, Portugal
Thematic approaches	x
Through major issues of society	Denmark and Slovakia
Through developing personal qualities	Austria (primary school), Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary
Goals and principles based	Finland, Latvia, Sweden, the Netherlands
Mixed approach	Belgium, Estonia, France

Table 1: European approaches in curricula. Source: Halasz and Michel, 2011; Grayson, 2014.

Ireland is one of the countries at the forefront of skills-based learning in Europe and have contributed a great deal to international partnerships for policy recommendations of skills and competencies, such as the European Policy Network on Key Competences in School Education [KeyCoNet] funded by the European Commission’s Lifelong Learning Program (KeyCoNet, n.d.). KeyCoNet is a network of over 100 educational organizations from 30 European countries that produces policy recommendations for the implementation of key competencies in education reforms (KeyCoNet, n.d.). Furthermore, researchers point to strong ties between Ireland and influential countries and organizations for skills-based learning, such as the UK, the US and the OECD (Limond, 2010; O’Donoghue and Harford, 2012; O’Doherty, 2014).

Since the early 2000’s, Ireland has worked on introducing skills-based learning in the Irish education system and in 2015 a new school reform was introduced for Lower Secondary Level, or Junior Cycle as it is called in Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). The reform introduced a new national curriculum that included a Key Skills Framework – a set of six generic skills (see page 26 for the KS Framework). The reform is quite new, and the implementation is still in progress. The new National Curriculum at Junior Cycle level is

planned to be fully implemented by 2020, and so far, English is the only subject to have undergone the reform in full (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). However, the Key Skills Framework is a separate curriculum component to subject curricula, and many Irish schools have therefore already undergone training in it and have started the implementation.

Curriculum research is a key theme in the field of Comparative and International Education, and there are vast differences of approaches to curriculum research. This thesis studies the incorporation of skills in curricula and contributes to curriculum research in doing so. The study of skills and competencies in educational policy is not new however, and researchers like Yates and Young (2010) and Winch (2014) have explored similar topics as this thesis sets out to do. Others, like Steiner-Khamsi (2014) and Dale (2007) comment on the emergence of skills and competencies in national educational policy by pointing to policy borrowing terms. This study will not include a discussion of policy borrowing although it is highly relevant for the discussion of skills-based curricula. However, this study aims to contribute to the discussion of new forms of bureaucracy in education and new accountability systems represented by the philosophy of skills-based curricula, following research done by (amongst others) Maroy (2008), Yates and Young (2010), and Wahlström (2016).

As the new National Curriculum for Junior Cycle is implemented throughout Irish schools, there has been little research done on the Key Skills Framework and the reform in general (Dempsey, 2016). Research on the matter of skills and competencies done elsewhere are often document analyses of policy recommendations or curricula that stem from large transnational organizations and/or governments (Halász and Michel, 2011). However, there is little information of how local teachers and principals perceive these frameworks. Lipsky (2010), Hjern (1982), Berman (1978) and others argue that research of public policy, such as curricula, should be examined through the eyes of local actors as it is them that are to carry out the policy at hand. Additionally, the already existing frameworks and recommendations of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills are quite normative and vague, which in turn can provide difficulties for implementation (OECD, 2009; Halász and Michel, 2011).

This research serves to examine the implementation of a skills framework such as Key Skills because 1) there has been done little research on the framework in Ireland itself, 2) studying the Key Skills Framework through the eyes of local actors may give useful feedback to Irish policy makers in the education field, and 3) other research on the field of skills' in educational policy is often provided by or examined through the eyes of large organizations and governments.



Furthermore, research on this dimension of the curriculum, and teaching, may help shed light on challenges and consequences of the use of the Key Skills Framework in local schools, matters that should be utmost important to whomever is interested in the implementation of it, be it policy makers or teachers.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Study

The background section of this introduction shows that substantial work on developing frameworks for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills has been done. Likewise, it shows that Ireland has contributed a great deal to these developments both internationally and nationally, finally implementing a new school reform in 2015 that includes the curriculum component Key Skills. There is however a research gap in the matter of examining skills-based learning in Irish classrooms, even after the implementation of Key Skills. Furthermore, it is important to investigate local actors such as teachers' and principals' perceptions and own experiences with the Key Skills Framework so far in the implementation process. There is more to research of implementation of public policy than establishing how one or several schools "have done it"; research that examines skills in education should also be able to put the matter in a larger picture or debate in which this thesis sets out to do.

This study is a qualitative comparative multiple case study done at two Junior Cycle schools in Dublin, Ireland. In total ten participants were interviewed and eight were observed. The informants provided rich insight to the implementation of Key Skills. To be able to carry out the study, the research purpose is as follows: *to examine how the Key Skills Framework from the New Junior Cycle Curriculum is implemented in local Irish schools, and to explore the implications this framework has for the professional autonomy of local actors.* To reach the overarching research purpose, these research questions are posed:

1. How do teachers and principals interpret and enact Key Skills within and across two lower secondary schools in Ireland?
2. How are Key Skills integrated within teaching at two lower secondary schools in Ireland?
3. How do teachers at two lower secondary schools in Ireland understand their autonomy in regard to Key Skills?

The research questions are comparative in nature and indicate the comparative dimensions of this study. The main comparative aspect is between the two local schools that have participated in the study. The two schools are similar; both are public secondary schools in Dublin that use the National Curriculum for Junior Cycle, and they share similar ethos. This is what constitutes a comparative and international education study of “Similar Systems – Different Outcomes” (SS-DO), described by Steiner-Khamsi (2013), which Chapter 4.2 will come back to. As the data collection took place it became evident that a second comparative aspect had to be included. The first research question therefore encompasses two comparative aspects, the first one between schools and the second one being between subject traditions, hence the articulation “within and across”.

### **1.3 Delimitations and Limitations**

The scope of this thesis includes only one curriculum component – the Key Skills Framework. The entire National Curriculum for Junior Cycle is therefore not examined nor is the school reform in total. The purpose was to look for perceptions, enactments and implementations with Key Skills, as well as establishing perceptions of challenges with the framework. The data collected for information about the Key Skills Framework served to be more than enough for this thesis and created an in-depth analysis. However, future studies may be interested in researching the whole new Junior Cycle reform in Ireland as it will shed light on other important aspects, such as changes in assessment. This may also contribute to the discussion of changes in teacher autonomy, as is explored in this thesis

Teachers and principals are at the core of this study – students have not participated. Including students as a sample for this study would have required a bigger sample and in doing so, more time. It would be interesting to explore students’ perceptions on the Key Skills Framework, especially with specific school initiatives concerned with skills-based learning. This could shed light on the *experienced curriculum* (see Chapter 5.1) and help identify other challenges that may not be evident for teachers and principals. Because of time constraints, this was not feasible for this thesis. Moreover, only two Junior Cycle schools participated in the study. As this is a qualitative multiple case-study, a small sample is adequate to provide in-depth information. However, to create a large-scale study with a bigger sample size on the same subject would help in the case of generalization. More information about limitations concerning sample size and methodology will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Context information is presented in Chapter 2. Because of ethical considerations, the two Junior Cycle schools have not been given much description. A detailed description of the two schools may have given a richer, contextual discussion; tying the data up to contextual factors. This was not adequate to include to maintain the anonymity of the two schools. In the future it may serve to study the implementation of Key Skills including more contextual, local factors, as it is often these that contribute to important aspects of implementation (Lipsky, 2010). Further on, the two participating schools are not under the patronage of the catholic church as many Irish schools are. For further research on the topic it would serve to include catholic schools in the sample.

Lastly, it serves to shed light on the focus on the analytical framework/theoretical approaches in this thesis. At times, these chapters might be considered too detailed or even long. The heavy focus on the analytical framework and the literature review has however been done intentionally, as it was my wish to explore the field of skills-based curricula and new forms of bureaucracy in education through both literature and empirical data.

## 1.4 Definition of Terms

The OECD's definition of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills was previously presented in section 1.1. Given that the definition is broad there is a need for a closer look into its dimensions. Many distinguish between 'competence' and 'skill', although both are encompassed by the term 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (Halász and Michel, 2011; OECD, 2009). The terms are often used interchangeably, it is therefore necessary to separate the two and define them one by one. A **competency** is described to go beyond skills as it is a complex system of cognitive-and non-cognitive skills as well as knowledge and attitudes (OECD, n.d.a; OECD, 2009):

*A competency is more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competency that may draw on an individual's knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating. (OECD, n.d.a, p.4).*

**Skill** on the other hand refers to the ability to perform complex motor and cognitive acts through, for instance, adaptability (Halász and Michel, 2011; OECD, n.d.a). The European Commission's CEDEFOP glossary defines skill as the ability to apply knowledge on a topic to solve tasks and problems, or a way of "knowing how to" (CEDEFOP, 2014). In other words, 'competence' is a broader concept than 'skill', the latter having functional aspects; one needs

‘skills’ in order to set attained knowledge out to life (Halász and Michel, 2011). **Key Skills** as presented in the Irish curriculum component Key Skills for Junior Cycle refers to “...a more general set of skills that are needed to support learners in their personal, social and work lives” (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2012b, p.2). The framework describes how students may develop specific skills in subjects, but that the Key Skills go beyond the boundaries of subjects. This idea is tied to *generic skills*, or *cross-curricular skills*; skills that are to be applicable to all parts of the curricula and are not limited to one specific subject. The Key Skills’ that are topic for exploration of this thesis are therefore cross-curricular in their nature.

Given that this study sets out to examine the implementation of an educational policy (a national curriculum component), it is necessary to address the term ‘**policy**’ and how ‘**curriculum**’ can be a type of policy. Policy may be difficult to define and can be viewed from different angles. The word policy can mean **policy as text** or **policy as discourse** (Ball, 2006). Policy as text refers to the actual policy documents, such as laws or government texts. Policy as discourse aims to look for the meaning behind the policy text and is concerned with the “hidden message”. Understanding policy as ‘policy as discourse’ helps to understand how the documents are constructed, developed and later applied. This study acknowledges both understandings of policy and uses both lenses to analyze the implementation of Key Skills. A **curriculum** is a policy text, more specifically it can be used as an example of an overall education policy. In the question of **policy implementation**, Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) define it as “...those actions by public and private individuals (or groups) that are directed at the achievement of objectives set forth in prior policy decisions” (p.447). This definition signals that implementation only happens once goals and objectives have been established in policy documents (Van Meter and Van Horn, 1975). A more profound look in to implementation and implementation of policy/curricula is presented in the literature review in Chapter 4.

Although **Junior Cycle** has been defined briefly before, it may serve to explain again that this term refers to Lower Secondary Level in Irish schools. This means that this term is used instead of ‘lower secondary’ but refers to the same levels in education; 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade, or 1<sup>st</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> year as it is called in the Irish education system. ‘Junior Cycle’ will be used throughout this thesis. **Senior Cycle** refers to Upper Secondary, and the Irish post-primary education system also encompasses a **Transition Year** between Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle. The **Leaving Certification** refers to an external examination at the end of Secondary education in Ireland.

As this thesis sets out to do a comparison between subjects, academic disciplines need to be defined. An **academic discipline** can be defined as a specific branch of learning (Del Favero, 2003, p.9). In school this translates best to a 'subject'. The comparison of subjects in this study is done between **Natural Science Subjects** and **Social Science Subjects**. How I have chosen to define and use the terms natural sciences and social sciences stem primarily from how the terms are understood in the Irish education system. Natural Science Subjects are therefore categorized to encompass subjects such as Science, Mathematics, Biology, Physics and Chemistry. Social Science Subjects refer to subjects such as Sociology, History, Philosophy, Geography, and Political Science but also to language subjects such as English and Irish. Although language subjects are often separated from social science subjects, it has been decided to include it in this thesis as part of the social science term as these subjects are often grouped together in Irish education.

## **1.5 Structure of the Thesis**

Following the introduction is Chapter 2 that presents background context of the Irish education system and the Key Skills Framework. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of this study with more detailed information about research strategy and design, the comparative dimension, the selection method, research site and participants, and the analysis method. It also mentions quality and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 is a literature review that presents already existing trends and research in the field of implementation of public policy, and in the field of curriculum research. In Chapter 5 the analytical framework is presented; a collection of several theories that have been chosen based on their relevance for this study. Findings are presented in Chapter 6, and a discussion follows in Chapter 7. Lastly, Chapter 8 has concluding remarks and recommendations for further research on the topic, as well as policy recommendations for the enactment of the Key Skills Framework.

## 2 Context

### 2.1 The Irish Context



Figure 2: Picture: Position of Ireland in world map. Provided by Google Maps.

The Republic of Ireland is an EU and OECD country that gained independence from Britain in 1920 and later cut ties to Britain even further when they left from the Commonwealth in 1949 (Thuesen, 2018). The country has seen several eras of civil war, but from the 1990's Ireland experienced rapid changes in modernization and economic growth. During the 1990s, Ireland “experienced the fastest growth rate of output and employment of any country in the OECD” (Green, 2000, p.1), increasing their number of jobs by 42%. A new direction for economic planning and education in Ireland was however set in motion already in the 1960's, after the country attended the Washington Conference in 1961 (O'Doherty, 2014). “Human investment”, or human capital and education were from here on tightly coupled in Ireland and the country emerged to develop strong ties with the OECD and their philosophy (O'Doherty, 2014). In later years Ireland has suffered through the financial crisis of 2008, however, it now looks like things are on their way back to prosperity (Thuesen, 2018).

Ireland's history is strongly influenced by religion, as civil wars and the conflict to regain Northern-Ireland is centered on the struggles between the Protestant Church and the Catholic Church (Thuesen, 2018). Today it is estimated that 87.4 % of the population in Ireland are members of the Catholic Church (Thuesen, 2018). The Catholic Church has also been an

important party in the Irish education sector. Traditionally, they offered education to the Irish population in a time when Britain did not, and today a vast majority of schools in Ireland are owned and under the patronage of the Catholic Church (Department of Education and Skills, n.d.). Approximately 90% of Primary Schools in Ireland are owned and run by the Catholic Church, and it is suspected that a similar number is prominent for Secondary schools too (Department of Education and Skills, n.d.).

The Irish Education system covers early childhood, primary, post primary, higher education, and further education and training. Ireland has undergone several changes in the education sector in the last 20 years. Deficiencies in technical skills urged for a commitment in developing these skills, which in turn created an ICT revolution in the 1990s (Green, 2000). Furthermore, a series of educational acts in the 1990s shifted the legislative basis in the education system in Ireland, ascribing new responsibilities for the Minister of Education and Skills and creating the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (Hislop, 2013). The Minister is obliged to consult relevant stakeholders in all decisions, bringing together a close cooperation between government and local stakeholders such as schools, teachers, parents and students.

Since 2000, there has been done considerable work to introduce skills and competencies in Irish education. At Junior Cycle level, reform work began in 2011 when the NCCA published ‘Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle – Innovation and Identity’, describing a vision, values and principles for the junior cycle as well as introducing 24 statements of learning (NCCA, 2012a). The reform was initiated on background of findings from PISA results and based on “(...) recommendations from a large public consultation on lower secondary education provision” (KeyCoNet, 2014, p.3). The document acknowledges that school reform and change is difficult in practice and opens up for greater attention on the local schools as sites of innovation. In 2012, ‘A Framework for Junior Cycle’ was published, drawing on *Towards a Framework*, as well as highlighting assessment (both external and internal) throughout – assessment for student learning is especially emphasized (Department of Education and Skills, 2012). Building on this framework, a new Framework for Junior Cycle was published in 2015.

The Framework for Junior Cycle that was published in 2015 outlines the major educational changes for lower secondary schools. It introduces *short courses*, *key skills* and *PLU’s* (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). Short courses are designed to last approximately 100 hours and represent a wide range of subjects such as philosophy, coding, artistic performance and digital media literacy (NCCA, n.d. a, Short Courses). These work alongside

regular subjects and include learning outcomes. Schools are free to design their own short courses. PLU's, or priority learning units, are based on differentiated education, and is offered to students with special learning disabilities (NCCA, 2014a). PLU's also contain learning outcomes.

Key Skills were introduced as a set of six generic skills; Managing Myself, Staying Well, Communicating, Being Creative, Working with Others and Managing Information and Thinking. The key skills move *across* the curriculum, and *beyond* learning in school (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). To implement these new changes successfully, subject syllabuses were being revised to balance subject knowledge and skills, and to better implement the new changes of Key Skills (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). The NCCA has changed their description of subject syllabuses to *subject specifications*. Subject specifications are outcome-based subject syllabus documents, and areas such as Key Skills are given significance. This represents a shift from content driven subject courses to more skills-based learning. Key Skills are embedded in the learning outcomes of subject curricula and short courses. Additionally to publishing the Framework for junior cycle of 2015, and a separate document for Key Skills, the NCCA has also published support materials for the implementation of skills. For instance, a guiding document of how to incorporate Key Skills into assessment practices was published on NCCA's webpage (NCCA, n.d., b).

At the end of the three-year period in Junior Cycle, the students sit for a state-held examination called the Junior Certification. A longitudinal study on the Irish education system showed that many of the participant schools 'teach-to-the-test', and that the presence of the Junior Certificate guides the teaching and learning in Irish schools (Smyth, 2009). Previously to the new Junior Cycle, internal, summative assessment was not part of the Irish education practice. With the new Junior Cycle, schools are encouraged to engage in summative assessments to complement the external assessments. Schools are also encouraged to adopt a school self-evaluation approach that constantly reviews how classroom practice facilitates the implementation and assessment of Key Skills. The primary purpose is to support student learning (Department of Education and Skills, 2015).



<b>Key Skill</b>	<b>Elements</b>
<b>Managing Myself</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowing myself</li> <li>Making considered decisions</li> <li>Setting and achieving personal goals</li> <li>Being able to reflect on my own learning</li> <li>Using digital technology to manage myself and my learning</li> </ul>
<b>Staying Well</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being healthy, physical and active</li> <li>Being social</li> <li>Being safe</li> <li>Being spiritual</li> <li>Being confident</li> <li>Being positive about learning</li> <li>Being responsible, safe and ethical in using digital technology</li> </ul>
<b>Communicating</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listening and expressing myself</li> <li>Performing and presenting</li> <li>Discussing and debating</li> <li>Using language</li> <li>Using numbers and data</li> <li>Using digital technology to communicate</li> </ul>
<b>Being Creative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Imagining</li> <li>Exploring options and alternatives</li> <li>Implementing ideas and taking action</li> <li>Learning creatively</li> <li>Stimulating creativity using digital technology</li> </ul>
<b>Working with Others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing good relationships and dealing with conflict</li> <li>Co-operating</li> <li>Respecting difference</li> <li>Contributing to making the world a better place</li> <li>Learning with others</li> <li>Working with others through digital technology</li> </ul>
<b>Managing Information and Thinking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being curious</li> <li>Gathering, recording, organizing and evaluating information and data</li> <li>Thinking creatively and critically</li> <li>Reflecting on and evaluating my learning</li> <li>Using digital technology to access, manage and share</li> </ul>

*Table 2: Key Skills of Junior Cycle. Source: Key Skills of Junior Cycle, published by the NCCA, 2014: [http://www.juniorycycle.ie/NCCA\\_JuniorCycle/media/NCCA/Documents/Key/Key\\_Skills\\_2014.pdf](http://www.juniorycycle.ie/NCCA_JuniorCycle/media/NCCA/Documents/Key/Key_Skills_2014.pdf)*

## **2.2 Summary**

To understand the Irish educational context this chapter has presented a brief overview of Irish modern history, the Irish education system and the work on the New National Curriculum for Junior Cycle. Ireland has since the 1990's undergone big societal changes that has set its footprint on the education sector. The work for an incorporation of Key Skills at the Junior Cycle level started in Ireland in 2011, on background of PISA-and other research results. The New Junior Cycle has introduced a wide range of changes, especially in assessment forms and subject descriptions – attempting to move from a content-based curriculum to a skills-based one.

# 3 Literature Review

This chapter presents a review of literature and research that are relevant for the purpose of this study. The chapter has been divided in two parts. First, a literature review of implementation of public policy in general will be presented, and a separate part for curriculum inquiry will follow. Both parts are later divided in further categories for the sake of comprehensiveness. At the very end there will be a summary of the chapter that will position this study within the presented literature and research.

## 3.1 Studies on Implementation of Policy

In this section, a closer look on three main perspectives used in implementation studies of public policy will be examined. It is important to keep in mind that this thesis is concerned with the implementation of a public policy – the new Irish National Curriculum for Junior Cycle. Studies on implementation of public policy can be categorized in three perspectives:

1. Top-down studies
2. Bottom-up studies
3. A combination of the two perspectives above

### 3.1.1 Top-Down Studies

Top-down implementation studies emphasize the role of the central policy makers (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983; McFarlane, 1989). The focus is the authoritative decision and to what degree this decision is being met by the target population. The effects and successfulness of policy objectives becomes important and there is a clear emphasis on the output. Top-down studies are often large-scale and seek to establish generalizable policy advice (Matland, 1995), and quantitative (often experimental) methods are used. Perhaps one of the most famous top-down frameworks is made by Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983). The framework has seven elements, those being 1) precise and clearly ranked objectives, 2) incorporation of an adequate causal theory, 3) provision of adequate funds for implementing organizations, 4) hierarchical integration within and among implementing institutions, 5) decision rules of implementing agencies, 6) recruitment of implementing officials, and 7) formal access by outsiders. With this framework, it is argued that policymakers can affect the implementation process in great deal,

“...by utilizing the levers at their disposal to coherently structure the implementation process” (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983, p.25).

This perspective has been criticized for giving central, administrative policy makers too much power, and ignoring political aspects (Matland, 1995). For instance, the focus on clear and explicit policy goals contradicts much of the political ambiguous language that is often required. It has also been criticized for ignoring the people behind the local implementation and their expertise, as it is often them who have the knowledge to carry out the policy. In top-down research, local actors are merely relevant when talking about effects, and are to be controlled to reach the desired outcome. Lastly, top-down models are criticized for failing to consider the initial stages of implementation, the stages before the statutory language takes place (Matland, 1995).

### **3.1.2 Bottom-Up Studies**

Bottom-up studies look at the implementation from the perspective of the people who carry out the policy (Lipsky, 2010; Hjern, 1982; Berman, 1978). According to this perspective, policy implementation happens at two levels: macroimplementation level (centralized government programs) and microimplementation level (local actors react to these programs and device their own) (Matland, 1995). In this view, central policy makers can only influence the implementation indirectly. Contextual factors within the environment for implementation become important and the local actors need to be understood in order to understand the implementation. Lipsky (2010) uses the term “street-level bureaucracy” which refers to public services such as schools. Street-level bureaucrats, such as teachers, interact with other citizens in their job and often have discretion and autonomy when performing their job. Most citizens encounter the government and government policy explicitly through these street-level bureaucrats, and not through the government itself. Street-level bureaucrats in this view, *become* the policy provided by the government. Hence, Lipsky (2010) emphasizes the importance of how public policy is a result of behavior and beliefs of individual, local actors. In a bottom-up perspective, local actors must be dealt with if policy is to be implemented successfully. Bottom-up studies should study the implementation through microlevel actors; their perceptions, goals and problems, through a normative and qualitative way (Hjern, 1982).

The bottom-up perspective has been criticized for overemphasizing local autonomy and for forgetting the role of democracy (Matland, 1995). In a democracy, the power lies with actors

who have been chosen based on their accountability, and the authority of street-level bureaucrats does not derive from this democratic process. Also, some argue that a factor for implementation such as available resources is determined centrally, which tends to get little attention in bottom-up studies (Matland, 1995). Lastly, the bottom-up perspective is criticized for relying too much on perceptions, and unconscious decisions are not being registered (Matland, 1995).

### **3.1.3 Mixed Perspective**

The last perspective attempts to incorporate both previous perspectives into one. This is a perspective that takes in to account both the top-down approach of centralized power – and the bottom-up approach of the importance of local and contextualized meanings. This perspective might be suitable because of the degree of complexity in policy implementation and attempts to analyze all levels. However, not many studies have been done using a mixed perspective (Matland, 1995). Some researchers (Matland, 1995: Berman, 1978) have attempted to create models that explain when the two approaches are most appropriate to use, rather than to build an entirely new mixed perspective-model. Sabatier (1986) believes that using this perspective makes it necessary to look at the implementation process in cycles of more than ten years. Hasenfeld & Brock (1991) also comment on the timespan, saying it takes “...a long-term view of the implementation process and acknowledge both the legislative capacity to structure the implementation process and the bureaucratic capacity to act in self-interest” (p.453). This perspective seems to move back and forth from several levels and advanced/mixed methodology would be necessary. However, top-down studies and bottom-up studies reflect more than research methodology. It can also reflect on different policy processes, and many argue that to understand the complex reality of policy implementation it is necessary to look at different levels of it (Matland, 1995).

## **3.2 Curriculum as a Field of Study**

In the previous section, an overview of implementation studies of policy in general was described. Since this study aims to research the implementation of a specific policy – the Key Skills Framework from the National Irish Curriculum for Junior Cycle, it is necessary to take a closer look in to curriculum studies.

Studying curricula as we know it today has been a field of study since the 1900's (Flindern and Thornton, 2004). Curriculum inquiry is complex and often incorporates political, administrative, pedagogical and didactical questions (Karseth and Sivesind, 2009). Hence, curriculum studies can be both top-down studies, bottom-up studies, or a mix of both. Historically, the curriculum has been a working link between politics and schools. The term *formal curriculum* is much used by scholars (Karseth and Sivesind, 2009; Goodlad et al, 1979). The formal curriculum has the mandate to describe and legitimate the content in education and sets the standards for schools' responsibilities and what they are to teach (Karseth and Sivesind, 2009). The formal curriculum hence derives from the national government (usually shaped by politicians in co-operation with teachers and researchers) and is what is also called *the national curriculum* or a policy text as Ball (2006) describes it. Through extensive reading on curriculum studies, there has been identified four dominant types. The remaining parts of this chapter will be focused on these;

1. Curriculum Theory
2. Curriculum History
3. Curriculum Policy and Reform
4. Curriculum Practice

### **3.2.1 Curriculum Theory**

Curriculum theory seeks to understand visions for what the curriculum should be, what philosophical underpinnings it should have and on what knowledge grounds the curriculum is based on (Wahlström, 2016; Kelly, 2009). This is tied with *curriculum planning*; the content of what we expect the students to learn is an important part when planning a curriculum (Kelly, 2009). Different ideologies play an important role when discussing curriculum theory (Wahlström, 2016; Kelly, 2009). In order to understand what curricula deems as valuable for students to learn (both as a text and as a discourse), there is a need to understand different ideologies of knowledge. Curriculum studies often address how questions about knowledge can be manipulated by societal and political ends and is often referred to as “the politics of knowledge” (Kelly, 2009).

In recent years, the importance of understanding where different knowledge traditions emerge from has been emphasized a great deal in curriculum studies. For curriculum research this may mean focusing on the tension between the traditional, subject-based curricula and the skills-

based curricula; a debate that relates to curriculum theory, curriculum practice and to a certain degree to curriculum history. Looking back in history, there was a massive expansion and institutionalization of schooling, and knowledge production began to emerge as separate academic disciplines (Young, 2008). This was later criticized for the reproduction of inequalities in the access to education and deciding who has access to favorable positions in society (Young, 2008; Biesta, 2009). The response was a skills-based curriculum, designed to focus on extrinsic purposes of education, such as preparing students for future work (Young, 2008). This shift implies changes in what type of knowledge we value, and in turn how the curriculum is practically enacted. The emergence of skills and competencies in curricula has additionally urged for research on *interdisciplinary* subjects. Boix Mansilla and Duraising define the term interdisciplinary as:

*We define interdisciplinary understanding as the capacity to integrate knowledge and modes of thinking in two or more disciplines or established areas of expertise to produce a cognitive advancement – such as explaining a phenomenon, solving a problem, or creating a product – in ways that would have been impossible or unlikely through single disciplinary means (2007, p.219).*

They argue that in order for students to learn skills, competencies and attitudes to deal with complex problems, there is a need to go beyond single subject disciplines (Boix Mansilla, Duraising, 2007). Studying Curriculum Theory then becomes a question of what knowledge that is represented in curricula, and why, and where the underpinning ideologies stem from. Chapter 5.4 will come back to this.

### **3.2.2 Curriculum History**

Research on curriculum history, can be a simple mapping of the origin and development of curricula, a history of curriculum ideologies, or research of curriculum in view of the development in society (Karseth and Sivesind, 2009). Curriculum research often includes administrative and institutional aspects of education, which Karseth and Sivesind (2009) argues, makes it natural to include historical background.

One way of including curriculum history may be through comparative research, where one compares certain aspects of curricula throughout history (Sivesind, 2013). For instance, some research studies the degree of specification of content and action in curricula. Previously, curricula were designed with a closed framing of content, tied to laws and regulations (Sivesind,

2013). More contemporary curricula however, show that there is an open framing of content, but a closed format of action. As Sivesind (2013) portrays, an open format of content can mean that teachers are free to choose a theme or a concept to teach, for instance a choice between the two topics Death Row in the USA or Gun Violence. An open format of action, however, can mean that one is free to express themselves in whatever genre they would like; a poem or a short story.

Through a historical lens, one can study how the specifications of content and action have changed in curricula and what implications this has for the practical enactment. It can tell a great deal about how curriculum is made and distributed today. Furthermore, curriculum history can be tied to wider institutional, societal and political changes of the past that have shaped the formal curriculum, and it can contribute to show how this is still a prominent factor today.

### **3.2.3 Curriculum Policy and Reform**

As briefly mentioned, curriculum often works as a tie between politics and education. Politically it is necessary to legitimate education through curricula. Often, the implementation of a new curriculum is conducted through a wider educational reform. Educational reforms aim to improve education and learning through tactical planning over a certain period of time (Karseth and Sivesind, 2009). It also aims to meet desired outcomes. Curriculum research that includes the wider educational reforms can vary. According to Karseth and Sivesind (2009), some researchers believe a close look in to local actors is important. Who implements the reforms, how, why and under what circumstances? Others emphasize the historical perspective to understand curriculum change. Some research explains curriculum change and reform through societal changes and through future-oriented ideas.

Ulf P. Lundgren (1979) has developed a framework for understanding curriculum and reform through a practical, local lens. The content of instruction and pedagogical classroom activities, as well as the organizations' (schools) ideological beliefs and perceptions was analyzed (Lundgren, 1979). Others, like Nordahl (2008), have done curriculum reform research through teachers' organization of teaching. These perspectives see teachers as the responsible actors for implementation and emphasizes the role of the street-level bureaucrat.

Goodson (1988) viewed curriculum renewal and reform through the eyes of internal, local actors, but also through external pressure. In this view, research needs to examine reforms with



an external lens (both historical, political and societal), while emphasizing the local actors and their influence. This relates to a mixed implementation perspective, where one sees all levels of the implementation process. Goodlad (1979) has developed a framework for curriculum development through a societal perspective. The system shows the different levels of process in curriculum implementation. From the stage of an idea, to where the institutionalized idea meets the students. Chapter 5.1 comes back to this framework.

In later years there has emerged new discourses within curriculum policy and reform. Globalization and internationalization is emphasized a great deal. Transnational organizations like the OECD and UNESCO may determine the educational agenda for nation states through policy recommendations that create competition between member states. Some researchers like Meyer, Boli, Thomas & Ramirez (1977), see curricula as a result of a “global village”, where transnational curriculum movements shape national education policy despite local differences. Comparative studies on curriculum reforms need to address questions like “is the national curriculum a result of local decisions, or do they reflect transnational ideas?” and research should examine the tense relationship between the local and the global in curriculum development (Karseth and Sivesind, 2009).

### **3.2.4 Curriculum Practice**

The last example of curriculum studies is curriculum practice. Curriculum practice refers to the actual, practical use of curricula in schools, such as school subjects, examinations, accountability and assessment (Hammersley and Hargreaves, 1983; Goodlad, 1979). For a long time, the focus of curriculum inquiry has been to study what *ought* to be, rather than what *is* (Goodlad, 1979). Curriculum theory and curriculum development needs to be accompanied by a critical analysis of curriculum practice, because policy documents do not always portray the social reality and there may be vast local differences (Atkinson and Coffey, 2011; Lipsky, 2010).

The 1970’s marked a shift in curriculum inquiry, where questions about curriculum change and school self-evaluation became central (Hammersley and Hargreaves, 1983). This shift is referred to as the ‘New Sociology of Education’. The new sociology “...gave a keen sense of the ‘is’ rather than the ‘ought’s’ of curriculum practice – warts and all!” (Hammersley and Hargreaves, 2012, p. 4). Young published *Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education* in 1971, that captured curriculum specifically, but also included

observations about what went on in classrooms. In previous curriculum studies, a practical and realistic view of the school curriculum was not available (Hammersley and Hargreaves, 1983).

To analyze the systemic character of curriculum practice, Goodlad (1979) points to three phenomena: The *substantive* side sees all matters surrounding goals and asks questions such as; ‘how is the curriculum institutionalized?’ and ‘what are the goals of the school?’. It is here that is and are questions are increasingly important but studying only the substantive side will leave the research in isolation (Goodlad, 1979). The *political-social* side seeks to see curriculum practice related to the broader decision-making process. Here, “inquiry involves the study of all those human processes through which some interests come to prevail over others so that these ends and means rather than other emerge” (Goodlad, 1979, p.17). The third phenomenon is *technical-professional*. When referring to technical matters, it is usually referred to the work of individuals and groups in educational organizations.

Curriculum inquiry needs to research the demands of technical-professionals and how these are met (Goodlad, 1979). All three phenomena described by Goodlad (1979) should be studied to reach a comprehensive inquiry, although they may be separated for purposes of the study. To study Curriculum Practice hence points to the realities in schools and shows a ‘true’ picture of how well the *intended* curriculum has actually been practiced by local actors.

### 3.3 Summary

In this chapter, there has been presented a literature review of policy implementation studies and of curriculum studies. The literature review of policy implementation studies showed that there are three main types; top-down studies, bottom-up studies and a mix of both. The literature review of curriculum studies identified four main topics in curriculum studies; curriculum theory, curriculum history, curriculum policy and reform, and curriculum practice. Although these have been separated here for the purposes of comprehensiveness, these categories may well overlap or be covered simultaneously. Curriculum Theory and Curriculum Practice may be working in pair as pointed out by Goodlad (1979); it can contribute to a greater understanding of curriculum planning, and to understand curriculum reform, one may need to study curriculum history in order to reach an explanation (Goodson, 1988). All categories are relevant for this study, hence the inclusion of them. However, some have proven to be more present than others.

This study seeks to explore curriculum implementation through the eyes of local actors, therefore bringing in a strong bottom-up perspective. The study also incorporates elements from top-down approaches however, for instance by looking at successes and challenges with the Key Skills implementation, and by commenting on clear articulation of objectives in the Key Skills Framework. Further on, this study bears elements of the both approaches as it explores the topic through a local lens, as well as incorporating a wider discussion around post-bureaucracy governance in education. In the question of curriculum inquiry specifically, this study has traits from all categories, although some more than others. Curriculum Theory is strong in this thesis as it sets out to discuss on what knowledge grounds the Key Skills Framework and the enactment of it, is based on. Curriculum Practice is also highly important as this study explores the practical enactment of the Key Skills Framework. The whole reform of Junior Cycle is not explored explicitly in this thesis, but it does comment on aspects of the reform to discuss changes in teacher autonomy and in doing so including elements from Curriculum Policy and Reform. Lastly, Curriculum History is the category that might be least present in this study (although nevertheless relevant) but is incorporated somewhat through discussions of changes in the articulation and formatting of curricula. The next chapter will present the methodology of this study, followed by the analytical framework chapter that takes a closer look on themes briefly presented here.

# 4 Methodology

This chapter describes the rationale behind methodological choices made throughout. The thesis is a qualitative comparative study, using a qualitative multiple-case study design and was carried out at two lower secondary schools in Ireland. The chapter presents the analytical tools used to interpret the collected data; qualitative content analysis together with ideational analysis formed the analytical tools of this study. Lastly, the chapter will briefly discuss quality measures, limitations of the study and ethical considerations.

## 4.1 Research Strategy

The philosophical and ideological underpinnings of a research determine how the research should be carried out (Bryman, 2012). The *epistemological* nature of a study refers to questions about how the social world should be researched (Bryman, 2012). This study falls partly under an *interpretivist* epistemological stance, where there is an emphasis on the individual's point of view and seeking to understand human behavior (Bryman, 2012). Complementary, the study also sets out to explore how individuals share views as part of a co-constructed reality, which is where the study deviates somewhat from the interpretivist stance. The *ontology* is of *constructionism*, that views social reality as being accomplished by local actors and that these can change the social reality made by external actors (Bryman, 2012, Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Further on, the *methodology* of this study combines *ideographic* and *nomological ideographic approaches* (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). This means that the aim is not to generalize, but rather get in-depth and first-hand information from two cases (the two schools) that can help shape a picture of the social reality within these cases. Lastly, this research follows an inductive approach, although bearing elements of the deductive approach, too. This study applied an analytical framework prior to collecting the data, but adjustments were made throughout.

Adding all this information together, this research falls under a qualitative research strategy. Ragin and Amoroso (2011) describes seven main goals for conducting qualitative social research. This study falls under the categories 'testing and refining theories' and 'exploring diversity', as it sets out to use an analytical framework to look for evidence in the data and exploring differences and similarities in the implementation of Key Skills. Furthermore, Ragin and Amoroso (2011) describes four basic building blocks in social research; 1) Ideas, 2)

Analytical Frames, 3) Evidence, and 4) Images. Ideas here refers to concepts from social theory that one wishes to test, redefine or apply to the data, and helps social researchers make sense of the data (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011). For the construction of ideas, ideational analysis is used in this study. These ideas, or theories, shape an analytical frame (or analytical framework) to a more detailed outline (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011). Social researchers then use evidence from the data to “extend, revise, and test ideas” (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011, p.57). Images refers to how social researchers make sense of the evidence in the data collection by constructing images, or idealizations, to understand, summarize and link it back to the ideas and analytical frames (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011). This process amounts to representations of social life, and the main part of this representation are the images built up from evidence (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011). This process of social research is representative for this study.

## **4.2 Research Design**

The research design of this study is a qualitative comparative design (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011). Comparative research examines similarities and differences across cases and is well suited for understanding diversity between and within cases (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011). Diversity is described by Ragin and Amoroso (2011) as vital to comparative research and explains that “the study of diversity is the study of patterns of similarities and differences within a given set of cases” (p.137). Furthermore, the exploration of diversity in social research is important to not assume uniformity between cases even though they might have been defined in the beginning as “the same” or having the same “system” (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011; Steiner-Khamsi, 2013).

When using a qualitative comparative design, this takes the form of a multiple-case study (Bryman, 2012). This entitles examining two or more cases using more or less identical methods (Yin, 2014). Multiple-case studies have proven to be frequently used in social science research, such as in education, political science, anthropology, sociology and organization research (Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2014), case study as a method is often used when posing “how” or “why” questions, and when examining contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context. “Decisions” is a major focus in case studies; why these decisions were taken, how and with what result (Yin, 2014). A multiple-case study design is often more robust than a single-case study design, as the evidence is often considered more compelling (Yin, 2014).

To enhance the case study method as an empirical inquiry, and to distinguish it from other methods such as ethnography, it is important to identify and establish the specific case(s) (Yin, 2014). To select the cases, Yin (2014) proposes a carefully selection based on replication logic: “Each case must be carefully selected so that it either (a) predicts similar results (a *literal replication*) or (b) predicts contrasting results bur for anticipatable reasons (a *theoretical replication*) (p.57). In this study, the case is how the curriculum element Key Skills is interpreted and enacted by Irish teachers and principals at two different schools, and their understanding of professional autonomy in regard to the use of Key Skills. The two cases (the two schools) were selected based on the assumption that they may produce different results, although working with a similar system (the use of the same national curriculum, both public lower secondary schools in the same city, and they share similar ethos). Steiner-Khamsi (2013) argues that comparative research in the education field is often based on SS-DO (same systems-different outcomes) or DS-DO (different systems-different outcomes). This thesis is a qualitative comparative study concerned with examining SS-DO-The use of Steiner-Khamsi’s (2013) comparative research category SS-DO, shows where qualitative comparative research can contribute to exploring Ragin and Amoroso’s (2011) understanding of diversity in social phenomena, and this study aims to do so.

#### **4.2.1 Comparative Dimensions**

There are two comparative dimensions in this study. The two schools, which also constitute the two cases of the study, shape the first comparative dimension. Additionally, another comparative dimension was added between participants who teach natural science subjects, and those who teach social science subjects. The two subjects were thus object for comparison within the use of Key Skills. The comparative dimension of the two schools became important for all three research questions, while the latter was prominent in research question 1 [RQ1]. The analysis moves across three levels: micro (individuals) level, meso (schools) level and macro (national) level. This is described by Yin (2014) as an ‘embedded design’ where each of the cases include several units of analysis, and in doing so provides a richer insight to each case.

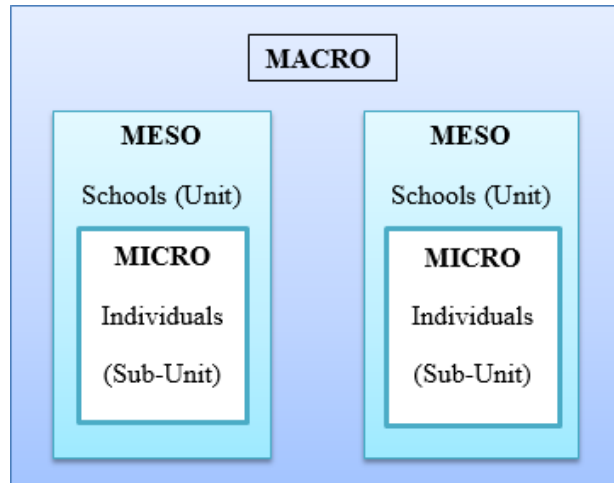


Figure 3: The different levels and units of comparison in this research (elaborated by researcher).

### 4.3 Research Site, Selection Method and Participants

The research sites for this study are two different lower secondary schools in the Irish capital Dublin. Dublin was picked merely because of access to schools; it is Ireland’s biggest city and has the most secondary schools in Ireland. The idea was that this made it easier to successfully get in touch with schools, because there are simply more options. Field work lasted from September 2017 to the end of November 2017.

The first intention of contact with lower secondary schools in Dublin proved to be difficult. Previous to starting the field work I had originally been in contact with two schools in Dublin that were interested in participating, however, when I arrived the country it came to my attention that an industrial dispute between a teacher union and the Department of Education and Skills had delayed the implementation of Key Skills in many schools, including my initial field work schools. The participants that were contacted in this initial stage were selected through **purposive sampling**. Purposive sampling is a sampling method that does not seek to sample participants on a random basis (Bryman, 2012). It is a strategic sampling method, where relevant participants are selected based on the research questions. There are different types of purposive sampling, in this study **criterion sampling** was used. In criterion sampling, participants are chosen based on certain criteria (Bryman, 2012). The criteria for the participants on this study were as follows:

<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Principals</b>	<b>Schools</b>
1. Lower Secondary/Junior Cycle teachers in Ireland 2. Two teachers from natural science and two teachers from social science	Principals in a lower secondary/junior cycle school in Ireland (the same schools where the participant teachers work).	1. Lower secondary/junior cycle schools in Ireland that use the Irish national curriculum 2. Public schools

Table 3: Criteria for participants in this study (elaborated by researcher).

From here, my Irish co-supervisor Majella Dempsey contacted acquainted schools and teachers in Dublin. Through these acquaintances, contact with two different schools in Dublin were successful. These schools were both lower secondary schools, and the participants contacted met the set criteria. This study uses a qualitative strategy, consequently it is small scale in nature, but in turn the participant teachers and principals of this study provided rich and insightful information in their interviews. The research site is the two different lower secondary schools in Dublin. The participants are four teachers from each school, whereas two teachers from each school taught social science subjects, and two taught natural science subjects. The principal from each school did also participate.

<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>SCHOOL 1 (S1)</b>	<b>SCHOOL 2 (S2)</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Teachers (T)	4	4	8
Principals (P)	1	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>

Table 4: Participants of this study (elaborated by researcher).

### **Field Work Schools**

The two schools that eventually became field work schools were similar. Both are public schools in Dublin, Ireland, although not necessarily in the same area. The schools have both been established within the last five years, and cover post primary – Junior Cycle, Transition Year and Senior Cycle. The two schools also share similar ethos and are not, unlike many Irish schools, owned and driven by the Catholic Church. The New Irish National Curriculum for Junior Cycle is used by both schools. For ethical considerations, the two schools will not be named in this thesis. They have been given two fictional names: School 1 and School 2. These



terms will be used throughout the thesis to ensure that the schools cannot be identified. Further comments about the schools are not possible without portraying important aspects that might give away identifying details.

## **4.4 Data Collection Tools and Analysis Method**

The data collection tools for this study are semi-structured interviews and participant observation. These collection tools were selected based on the research questions, the research strategy and the research design.

### **4.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Qualitative interviewing tends to be less structured than in the quantitative strategy. In quantitative research, interviews need to be structured to ensure the reliability and validity of the concepts measured (Bryman, 2012). In qualitative interviewing, the aim is to emphasize the participants' own perspectives. Semi-structured interview mirrors the flexibility of doing interviews in qualitative research: "The researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway on how to reply" (Bryman, 2012, p.471). All questions or topics in the interview guide will be covered because the researcher generally follows a pre-set script, but the researcher may ask the questions in different order, or ask follow-up questions (Bryman, 2012). This allows for new ideas to emerge from the data, as the participants may add information that was previously unknown to the researcher. Table 4 presents the participants for the interviews.

An interview guide was made prior to conducting the interviews, one interview guide for teachers and one separate one for principals (see appendix 1 and 2). When making the interview guide, a few preparation elements described by Bryman (2012) were considered; the interview questions/topics were articulated so that the research questions could be answered, the language used was comprehensive and relevant, there were no 'leading' questions and the questions were somewhat in order, creating a natural flow.

### **4.4.2 Participant Observation**

Participant observation is of qualitative nature. In participant observation, the observer immerses himself/herself to the situation through an extended period (Bryman, 2012). When

doing participant observation, the researcher observes the participants in their “natural habitat”, listens and asks questions. The researcher participates in the organizations’ work, but is not a full member (Bryman, 2012). The researcher in participant observation may take on a *covert* or *overt* role. Using a covert role, the researcher does not disclose himself/herself as a researcher, while using an overt role is the opposite; the participants know your role as a researcher. The overt role has been used in this study throughout, where honesty about the research’ intentions, aims and methods were fully disclosed from the beginning. During the observation, field notes were used. These were written in more detail at the end of every observation day. When contacting the two participant schools of this study, a consent for participation document was presented, containing information about the aims of the study and what methods would be used (see appendix 4).

Prior to the observations, an observation guide was made and tested (see appendix 3). The observation guide was made primarily to fit research question two and three. All observations were held in classrooms. Eight classes in each school were observed; two classes per participant teacher. In total, this makes up sixteen classes of observation. In School 1, classes were sixty minutes long, and in School 2 classes were fifty minutes long. In total, this makes up around sixteen hours of observation.

<b>SUBJECTS OBSERVED (Junior Cycle Level)</b>	<b>CLASSES School 1</b>	<b>CLASSES School 2</b>	<b>TOTAL (Classes)</b>
English	3	1	4
Irish	1	0	1
Perfoming Arts	0	1	1
History	0	2	2
Math	2	2	4
Science	2	1	3
STEM	0	1	1
<b>Total (Classes)</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16</b>

Table 5: Classes of observation (elaborated by researcher).

#### **4.4.3 Advantages of Using Semi-Structured Interviews and Participant Observation**

The use of semi-structured interviews and participant observation in isolation can have both advantages and disadvantages. Research that relies solely on interviewing, relies on the answers and verbal behavior alone (Bryman, 2012). There may be important matters that the participants see as unimportant or take for granted, and these are likely to surface during participant

observation (Bryman, 2012). In using both collection methods, the researcher will be able to identify these matters, as well as gaining access to true behavior, rather than to rely only on what is being said in the interviews. Furthermore, participant observation entails the researcher to have contact with the social setting, which allows for a greater contextualization of the phenomenon being studied (Bryman, 2012). The relationship between context and behavior can therefore become clearer. Using interviews presents different advantages:

*“In participant observation, the researcher is invariably constrained in his or her interactions and observations to a fairly restricted range of people, incidents, and localities. Participant observation in a large organization, for example, is likely to mean that knowledge of that organization far beyond confines of the department or section in which the observation is carried out is likely not to be very extensive. Interviewing can allow access to a wider variety of people and situations.”* (Bryman, 2012, p. 496).

Usually, participant observers gather additional data through other collection methods such as interviews (Bryman, 2012). To deal with the disadvantages of using one collection method over the other, it became evident that to get a clearer and fuller understanding of the phenomena, it was necessary to use both semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Also, using both methods it is more likely to find unexpected or unknown data (Bryman, 2012).

#### **4.4.4 Analysis Method – Qualitative Content Analysis**

All interviews in the study were audio-recorded. Qualitative interviews are often recorded because the interviewer must be alert to what is being discussed, ask follow-up questions and draw attention to interesting answers (Bryman, 2012). The interviews were later **transcribed**. By using transcription, other researchers can easily evaluate the analysis of the study and it allows for the data to be reused in other ways (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, transcribing will help in the event of accusations of researcher bias (Bryman, 2012). The transcription then becomes a tool for evidence and transparency.

For the participant observation, field notes were used. The data collected in this study, transcriptions of interviews and field notes of participant observation, amount to a large and rich dataset. To be able to analyze the large dataset, it was decided to use **qualitative content analysis**. Qualitative content analysis is an analysis method that looks for specific themes in the data (Bryman, 2012). The use of this analysis method is widely used in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012), particularly because it helps in focusing and narrowing down the analysis,

while at the same time reducing the data in a somewhat systematic way. A **coding scheme** was developed that was both concept – and data-driven, meaning it draws from the analytical framework used and the data collected. The coding scheme developed deduced sub-themes mainly from the analytical framework, while the minor themes stem from the data collected. The larger themes were created based on both methods. See below for an example of the coding scheme.

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>SUB-THEMES</b>	<b>MINOR THEMES</b>
<b>Importance of Key Skills</b>	Inside of School	Independent learners Think outside the box To build a knowledge bank
	Outside of School	Work Function as citizens Hobbies Overall health Reach your own potential
<b>Accountability</b>	Public Accountability	Parents Public Inspection Reports (Inspection) Leaving Certification Results
	Professional Accountability	Teacher’s own professional sense of duty
	Personal Accountability	Personal, internalized morals and values

Table 6: Coding (elaborated by researcher).

To ensure consistency and validity of the codes, the coding scheme needs to be tested (Schreier, 2013). The coding scheme developed for this study was tested on one of the teacher interviews. Additionally to the testing, passages/segmentations were compared and contrasted throughout, to make sure that codes did not overlap, or that there were not any categories missing.

### 4.4.5 Ideational Analysis

Complementary to using qualitative content analysis, an ideational analysis approach has been used. Ideational analysis uses the ‘ideal type, or an ‘idea’ described in an analytical framework, as an analytical tool (Bratberg, 2014). Ideal types are drawn from already existing theory and literature and are used as analytical tools for empirical data (Bratberg, 2014) and relates to Ragin and Amoroso’s (2011) understanding of ideas in social research. In a sense, this is a

highly qualitative approach, but it follows both an inductive and a deductive process (Bratberg, 2014; Ragin and Amoroso, 2011). The analytical frameworks give certain theoretical assumptions that the research questions rely on (deductive), but the empirical data will create a foundation to construct new theoretical ideas (inductive).

For the purpose of answering the research questions of this study, it is necessary to use ideal types and ideas from theory to place skills in the center of bureaucracy movements in education, as well as tying these movements to the discussion of knowledge in curricula, autonomy and accountability. Ideational analysis will enable the research to look for bureaucracy models at the two field work schools in Ireland, putting the analytical framework of this study in the center. It becomes a question of whether the field work schools are teaching-oriented using a professional-bureaucratic model or learning-oriented using a post-bureaucratic model, or most probably – a combination of these. Chapter 5 describes the theoretical underpinnings for the making of these two ideal types:

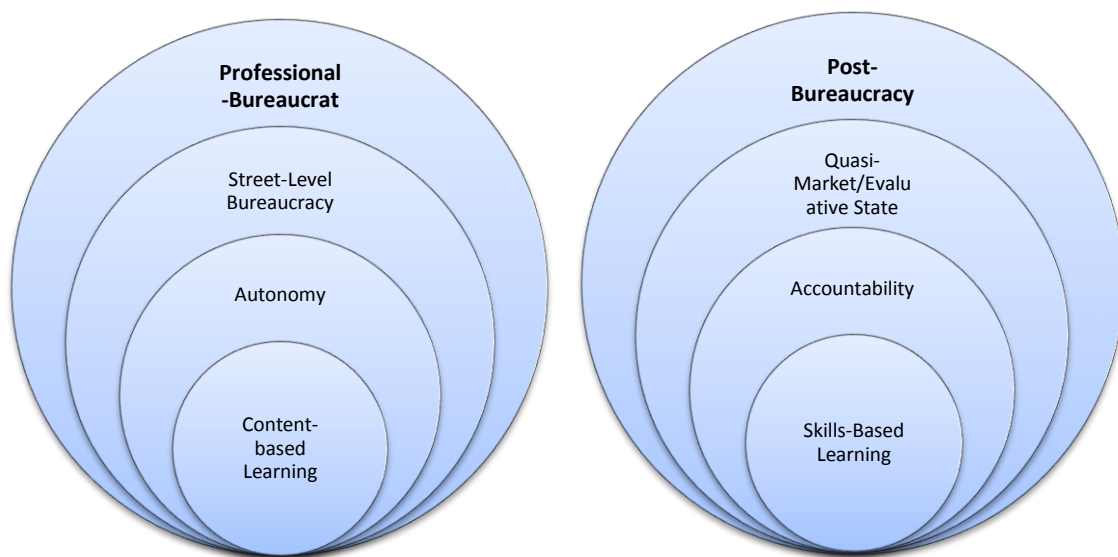


Figure 4: Ideal Types. Elaborated by researcher, customized from Maroy (2008); Lipsky (2010); Wahlström (2016); Young (2008).

## 4.5 Quality of the Data

### 4.5.1 Limitations

The introduction (Chapter 1) and earlier sections of this methodology chapter briefly presents the scope of this thesis, sample size and limitations tied to it. As this study uses a qualitative

comparative design the sample size is small-scale in nature. Generalization has therefore not been adequate for this study. For results that may provide enough data to generalize across settings, a quantitative research strategy would be necessary. This was not the aim of this study however, but I believe it to be important to keep in mind as this study proceeds to present the findings.

As the field work took place, a second comparative aspect was added between subjects. The subjects that were included in the data collection were divided in two, Natural Science Subjects and Social Science Subjects. As the interviews and observations took place it became clear that a wider range of subjects should be examined. The subject Physical Education [PE] was mentioned by several informants when conducting field work but was not included in the sample size. Time constraints made this difficult for the thesis, but for future studies that may be interested in exploring how skills-based learning plays out in subjects, it is advisable to include a wide range of subjects in their sample size.

Lastly, it is important to state that the informants are in fact human. The consent form for participation (appendix 4) was presented to both schools and all informants prior to conducting field work. This explained the purpose and research questions of the study. The consent form was given to the informants for ethical reasons and to create trustworthiness, but it is possible that informants may have provided different perceptions if not given that much information about the study prior to conducting interviews. Furthermore, Bryman (2012) points out that sometimes informants give out the information they think the researcher wants or may be afraid (for different reasons) to give their honest opinion on a topic. As the data collection took place this became evident once, after a school inspection was notified to one of the participant schools. One of the teachers that was to be inspected expressed positive thoughts around school inspections during the interviews. However, when being notified of an actual school inspection taking place these thoughts seemed to have slightly changed. Although it is my belief that the informants spoke the truth (most informants expressed they would feel comfortable participating in this study without anonymity), it is important to keep in mind that some factors such as fear may contribute to shape the participants' answers. In order to prevent this, I as a researcher had to build trust with the informants, creating a calm atmosphere during interviews and observations as well as using probes during interviews. Nevertheless, this issue may have affected the dependability of this study.

## 4.5.2 Quality Measures

The quality measures of this study are positioned somewhat between a realist view of quality measures (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011), and a qualitative one that draws from Hammersley's (1992) constructivist position. Simultaneously to terms that are usually used in quantitative research, this study will use terms developed by Guba and Lincoln (1994) and by Yin (2014). This is done to better encompass the qualitative nature of this study, while still acknowledging some important aspects of the traditional view of reliability and validity.

Internal validity, or *credibility* as Guba and Lincoln (1994) portray it, refers to how good of a match there is between the findings of the study and the theoretical ideas that have been developed (Bryman, 2012). This has to do with the credibility of the findings. When doing this case study, to ensure that there is somewhat of a match between findings and theoretical ideas, the analytical framework was edited throughout as new concepts emerged from the data. There was a constant back-and forth between data and theory. In order to reach internal validity and credibility, the researcher has to make sure he or she follows good research practice and have a clear findings section. Yin (2014) argues that some researchers may 'infer' that a phenomenon happened because of some earlier occurrence based on the data collected. To prevent this, this study does not conclude by generalizing for the whole Irish nation but has established how participants within the two field work schools understand the phenomena of Key Skills. The findings section has also been presented as clear as possible.

The second type of measurement is external validity. This refers to the degree in which the findings can be generalized across settings (Bryman, 2012). Guba and Lincoln (1994) refers to this as *transferability*. The nature of qualitative research is **not** to generalize, which makes this quality measurement difficult. However, to ensure some sort of external validity, this study has applied Hammersley's (1992) view: the researcher in qualitative studies cannot act as mirrors of the social world, as it is simply not possible to gain access to the same situations twice. Consequently, a generalization should not be established. Instead, this study aims to find **representations** of the social world, without claiming them to be a standard. Ragin and Amoroso (2011) refers to this as creating **images**. To further ensure external validity, this study has aimed to provide thick and detailed descriptions in the findings section by including quotes from the informants.

The last measurement type is reliability, what Guba and Lincoln (1994) refer to as *dependability*. This refers to whether one can repeat the research and gain the same results (Bryman, 2012). This is to ensure that there are no biases, and that the methodology is used correct. Hence, this study has adopted the “auditing-approach” which entails having complete records from all the phases of the research (Bryman, 2012; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Through this thesis the reader is given clear access to the different steps taken, such as: formulation of research questions and research purpose, how the research site and participants were selected, how the data was collected and later transcribed and analyzed by a qualitative coding scheme and ideational analysis, and an insight to actual quotes from the participants in the findings. Methodological and theoretical choices are also justified throughout.

Lastly, it serves to add the last point of Guba and Lincoln’s (1994) quality measures; *confirmability*. This ensures that there is as much objectivity as is possible in a qualitative study. I, as a researcher, have therefore put great emphasis on not acting biased, neither by theoretical assumptions or personal values.

### **4.5.3 Ethical Considerations**

This study has ethical clearance from the Data Protection Official at the Norwegian Social Science Data Services [NSD]. In addition to the ethical clearance, certain ethical measures have been made. Before the data collection process took place, the participants were presented with a consent form they were to sign (see appendix 4) with a clear description of the purposes of the study, the aims and research design.

During the data collection process, a “scrambling key” was kept. A scrambling key is a list of names or a document with identification of individuals. In a scrambling key file, personal information is removed such as names, social security numbers, telephone numbers or email addresses and replaced with codes. It was made sure that the scrambling key file was stored separately from the rest of the data. The computer in which the scrambling key and the rest of the data is stored is secured with a password. The decision of creating a scrambling key was based on recommendations from the NSD. The data has been treated confidentially, only the researcher and the supervisor of the project has had access to it. At the end of the project all identifying and indirectly identifying data will be deleted. The audio-recordings will also be deleted.



## 4.6 Summary

This chapter presented the quantitative and qualitative strategies, and from here concluded that a qualitative strategy is adequate for this study. The research design of this study was then presented, a comparative design with multiple cases which became a multiple-case study design. The cases of this study are the two different schools in Dublin. Further, ideational analysis was described as part of the research design. The selection method was described; purposive sampling and snowball sampling has been used. The research site, the participants and units of analysis has been presented. Further, the data collection tools were described and later justified; semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The analysis method was also included, for purposes of enhancing the reliability of this study. Quality measures were then presented in more detail, and at last ethical choices were discussed in brief.

# 5 Analytical Framework

This chapter will present the analytical framework behind this study. To begin with, theory of curriculum implementation will be presented, developed by Lundgren (1979) and Goodlad (1979), followed by an analytical framework of bureaucracy in education by Maroy (2008), Williamson (2017) and Lipsky (2010). The concepts of autonomy and accountability will then be presented, and lastly there will be a section for different knowledge traditions in curricula (Wahlström, 2016; Young, 2008).

## 5.1 Curriculum Implementation

For the purposes of studying curriculum implementation it has been decided to use Lundgren's (1979) and Goodlad et al.'s (1979) curriculum perspectives. Both talk about the difference between the *intended curriculum* and the *implemented curriculum*. The intended curriculum is the articulation in the policy text at hand, while the implemented curriculum is about what actually happens in schools and classrooms. The former relating to policy as text, and the latter to policy as discourse (Ball, 2006).

Lundgren (1979) describes three curriculum levels in an implementation. The first level surrounds principles for education, such as the goals of education, the content and the function of the curriculum. The second level is about the making of the curriculum itself, and the political and administrative aspects of it. The NCCA would be on this level. The third level examines how the curriculum directs teaching and learning – how schools and teachers facilitate for curricula in their daily practice. Goodlad et al.'s curriculum levels can be linked to Lundgren's levels. Within the intended curriculum category, we find Goodlad et al.'s *ideal curricula* that are the original assumptions of the curriculum designer and the *formal curricula* that is the official curriculum document (policy as text) (Goodlad et al., 1979). The former describes Lundgren's first or upper level, and the latter describes the second. The next three levels of Goodlad's model can be said to be a more detailed description of Lundgren's third and last level.

Within the implemented curriculum we find the *perceived curriculum*, the *enacted curriculum* and the *experienced curriculum* (Goodlad et al., 1979). The perceived curriculum refers to interpretations done by individual schools, principals and teachers of the formal curriculum.

This can be shaped by a number of things, not just the curriculum document, but for instance personal background, culture, education etc. Based on the interpretations comes the enacted curriculum – what goes on in the classrooms. The last level refers to how students (first and foremost but can also include parents and other individuals) experience the curriculum.

## 5.2 Post-Bureaucratic Developments

Educational ‘governance’ relates to modes of institutional regulation set by educational authorities, hereby mechanisms such as orientation, coordination and control (Maroy, 2008). Maroy (2008) describes a change in institutional regulation in the education sector over the last 20-30 years in European countries, evolving six trends: increasing autonomy for schools, rise of external evaluations, an increase in school choice, diversification of curricular offer, an increase in regulation of control of teaching work, and a wish to balance centralization and decentralization. Further, Maroy describes three forms of governance in education; *the bureaucratic-professional*, and two models of ‘post-bureaucratic’ governance; *the quasi market regulation* and *the evaluative state*.

The *bureaucratic-professional* is associated with local autonomy, an autonomy that is based on teachers’ and principals’ professional competencies (Maroy, 2008). This mode of governance includes a nation-state responsible for education, but with professional components responsible for carrying out these formal guidelines. Hence, there are two modes of regulation; a nation-state/bureaucratic one, and a professional/pedagogical mode. However, the change in institutional regulation in the education sector has developed this governance model further.

The *quasi market regulation* model has been widely promoted in Anglo-Saxon countries (Maroy, 2008). Concerned with inefficiency, the market model goes against the bureaucratic-professional model. The nation state is still responsible for defining educational objectives, and teachers are given autonomy to carry out these. Furthermore, education quality becomes more important through regulations such as free choice of schools. Schools then compete for clients (the students) through performance rates, which puts pressure on schools to improve their practice. Steiner-Khamsi (2014) argues that a term such as ‘key skills’ generates a fear of falling behind, that in turn creates competition among nation states, or even local schools. The *evaluative state*, or *governance by results* model, is largely combined with the quasi market model (Maroy, 2008). Still, education is centrally defined by the nation-state, but it ‘negotiates’

goals with local schools and delegates responsibilities to reach these goals (Maroy, 2008). Later, an external school performance evaluation is set up to see whether they have fulfilled their 'contract'. Within this model, schools rely on external evaluation, but are also expected to do internal evaluation to continue their improvement (Maroy, 2008). In Ireland, a set of legislative changes have since the 1990's increased the monitoring and evaluation of teachers' work: "(...) it was thus expected that schools nationally would engage with the principle of whole-school review, intensified planning activity, programme innovation and structural change" (McCruairc and Harford, 2008, p. 502). At the same time, a neo-liberal agenda spread across the western world, Ireland included, demanding transparent accountability of all state-funded bureaucracies (McCruairc and Harford, 2008). The rise of New Public Management [NPM] also contributed to a shift in the public sector towards organizational models that were traditionally used in the private sector (Utdanningsforbundet, 2002). Results, competition, benchmarking, decentralization of power and performance-based systems become evident also in the public sector. School choice, competition, and new forms of control through performance management techniques became prominent with the rise of NPM and neo-liberalism (Ball and Youdell, 2007). In Ireland, this led to the rise of quasi-league tables and a growing interest in school performance and effectiveness, especially in post-primary schools (McCruairc and Harford, 2008). What could be measured was considered of value, and there was a re-emergence of inspection (whole schools evaluation, subject inspection and thematic evaluations) in Irish post-primary schools.

Ben Williamson (2017) examines the shift from a bureaucratic/professional knowledge in education to new forms of post-bureaucratic expertise through the emergence of complex technologies in education. Williamson (2017) refers to 'digitization' and 'datafication' of education. The latter one refers to the transformation of different aspects of education, such as assessments or school inspection reports (Williamson, 2017). 'Digitization' refers to the translation of these aspects into software code and making a digitized e-learning software product (Williamson, 2017). Individualization and personalization is the motivator behind these new technologies and customizing learning to the learners' needs based on database-driven technologies that can perform complex calculations and analysis (Williamson, 2014). The collection and analysis of what individuals perform is made possible, and "...has been integral to the formation of new techniques of governance" (Williamson, 2014, p.5). Competencies, skills and behavioral aspects of a learner becomes calculable and are subject for comparison across nations, cities, schools, classrooms and individuals. ICT solutions in one sort or another

then becomes an artefact in itself, that based on the learners' calculations can predict the future needs for that particular learner.

### **5.3 Teachers as Street-Level Bureaucrats**

Michael Lipsky's term *street-level bureaucrat* relates to Maroy's understanding of the bureaucratic-professional. Teachers as street-level bureaucrats 'deliver' the educational policy set by the government (Lipsky, 2010), and as briefly described previously, most citizens encounter policy through these street-level bureaucrats. Students and parents meet educational policies, such as new reforms, directly through their local schools, teachers and principals. The people behind the reforms will rarely meet with the intended audience, leaving street-level bureaucrats responsible for the representation of policy delivery.

Lipsky comments on the discretion and relative autonomy of street-level bureaucrats. Teachers exercise great discretion in meeting with students. They determine the benefits and sanctions; they decide who should be suspended and which students should have special-needs education (Lipsky, 2010). This does not mean that teachers and schools are unrestrained from laws and rules, because these do exist, however it refers to street-level bureaucrats as professionals who are expected to "exercise discretionary judgment in their field" (Lipsky, 2010, p. 14). Teachers are in this view professionals in specialized areas, and relatively free from supervision from others; for instance, principals are rarely seen to step in to teachers' classrooms to observe (Lipsky, 2010). Lipsky further discusses the autonomy street-level bureaucrats exercise in meeting with organizational authority and policy. Teachers for the most part agree with the organizational authority, or policy philosophy represented by the government, but what happens when they don't share the same objectives as in policy documents? Interests may differ between street-level bureaucrats and policy makers, which may result in negative attitudes towards the incentives and teacher may even oppose the policy change if they find it illegitimate (Lipsky, 2010).

Lipsky (2010) argues that the level of discretion and autonomy permits street-level bureaucrats to *make policy* for citizens they interact with. Hence, teachers may become policy makers through decision making in meeting with students and parents. According to Lipsky, the level of autonomy is difficult to withdraw because street-level bureaucrats are expected to deal with

complex situations concerning people with different needs. To the concern of bureaucratic control, Lipsky states:

*“The preconditions of an accountability policy may exist in many bureaucratic contexts, but they do not apply where street-level bureaucrats are concerned. Efforts to improve bureaucratic accountability policies in these contexts may undermine rather than enhance service quality and may systematically decrease service quality when certain conditions of public bureaucracy prevail.”* (Lipsky, 2010, p. 161).

However, as seen in Maroy’s terms of post-bureaucracy, the view of professional discretion may have changed. Professional discretion and autonomy today, may be seen as a hinder to meet standardization and desired results, which leads to a climate of accountability, competition, and internal and external evaluation (Maroy, 2008). Maroy argues that the educational climate today expects new things from relationships and cooperation, making it difficult to distinguish between external and internal decision making. Street-level bureaucrats would still act with some of the professional autonomy described by Lipsky, but as argued by Maroy, the bureaucratic-professional could be seen as inefficient, and threatened by external regulations and evaluations.

## **5.4 Autonomy versus Accountability**

In a bureaucratic-professional/street-level bureaucracy model agents execute great autonomy. Engelstad (2003) has an analytical understanding of autonomy as a balance between ‘freedom to act’ and ‘freedom from coercion’. Freedom to act, also called *positive freedom*, refers to freedom to act upon own assumptions in social settings. *Negative freedom*, or ‘freedom from coercion’, refers to freedom from external impacts and situations that are experienced as forced. How professional actors perceive their own autonomy depends on whether the question at stake is perceived as legitimate, and whether the local actors can make individual decisions based on own moral. Hence, autonomy is a result of individual freedom and the level of legitimacy perceived by professional actors. It is about mutual trust and carrying out a professional responsibility in different settings (Mausethagen, 2015).

However, in a post-bureaucratic model, accountability and different forms of evaluation is prominent. In simple terms, accountability describes “a relationship in which people are required to explain and take responsibility for their actions” (Sinclair, 1995, p.220). Sinclair

(1995) distinguishes between a few types of accountability, some being; public, professional and personal. Public accountability is geared towards an informal but direct accountability to “the people”; interested community groups and individuals, through hearings, reports and public concerns (Sinclair, 1995). Professional accountability values expertise and professionalism and invokes the sense of duty within that profession (Sinclair, 1995). In a more individual and intrinsic sense, personal accountability is tied to personal beliefs and values such as respect for human dignity, and accountability is “driven by adherence to internalised moral and ethical values” (Sinclair, 1995, p.230). The important question of accountability, it being political, managerial, public, professional or personal, is whether the agents (teachers) experience accountability as a way of learning and evolving in their profession, or whether it is experienced as a form of control (Mausethagen, 2015).

As the educational system moves towards an age of accountability, results, assessment, measurement and standards becomes important. Standard-setting in education often distinguishes between two types: content standards and performance standards (Ravitch, 1996; Stufflebeam, 1994). The former one relates to decisions of knowledge and what students should learn. Performance standards are clear-set goals or aims often tied to testing and evaluation. Both types of standards are nevertheless concerned with the same thing; to improve achievement by having clearly defined expectations, and many would argue that an absence of standards can result in an education system without coherence (Ravitch, 1996). To obtain coherence in evaluation – be it informal, formative or a behavioral assessment – every agent should have a collective understanding of what the standards entitle. Standard-setting is about equality of educational opportunity and making sure that students have the same opportunities to do well, and that they are judged by the same performance measurements (Ravitch, 1996).

Stufflebeam (1994) describes *propriety standards*, which is concerned with the rights of the person being evaluated and acknowledges how evaluations affect people in different ways. It evolves around ethical and legal issues of evaluation. *Accuracy standards*, also portrayed by Stufflebeam, (1994) are standards that ensure technically adequate information of the object/subject being evaluated. *Utility standards* relates to standards that are relevant for the given audiences, and lastly, *feasibility standards* are to ensure diplomatic and realistic evaluations (Stufflebeam, 1994). Furthermore, in the question of what is *measurable* and possible to evaluate, one has to turn to the construction of standards. If standards to an objective

are possible to make, and easily understood by all its' users, it is fair to assume that it can be measured.

## 5.5 Different Types of Knowledge

Politicians and policy-makers have made us aware that the world is now a “knowledge society”, and that we need equipped “knowledge workers” (Young, 2008). However, in the question of what this knowledge is, there is much confusion. Ninni Wahlström (2016) outlines different didactical traditions in education policy texts, some being curricula. She builds on Aristotle’s three categories of knowledge to understand what is regarded as knowledge in curricula: *episteme* (“to know”, scientific knowledge that is easy to store and transmit to others), *techne* (skills and craft knowledge, a type of knowledge that comes with experience and practice), and *phronesis* (practical wisdom, the ability to understand how a specific goal or value is reached). Knowledge in curricula is picked out carefully through political, economic, cultural and ideological matters, determining what students should learn and why (Wahlström, 2016). Historically, there are four types of knowledge that has been dominant in curricula.

*Scientific rationalism* bases knowledge on academic subjects. Every subject has their own discipline, and their own bases for knowledge, terms and methods (Wahlström, 2016). To reproduce knowledge to coming generations manifests itself in this tradition, while at the same time giving students the necessary intellectual ability (Wahlström, 2016). This is an *episteme*-type of knowledge. Using a *Social effectiveness* perspective, knowledge would be based on what is deemed important to know for future generations. Knowledge, alongside skills and competencies, is not based on specific subject disciplines, it is rather a question of generic knowledge (Wahlström, 2016). Hence, knowledge produced by schools and knowledge you would obtain elsewhere are intertwined and the structural limits between these fades. Terms like human capital and competition are dominant in this tradition (Wahlström, 2016). It is a slightly different tradition, as it is not based on academic knowledge, rather an economic model, although it does portray the importance of a few subjects, such as science and modern foreign languages (Wahlström, 2016).

A *humanistic* tradition centers on the student (Wahlström, 2016). Like in a capability approach, education in itself is responsible for the personal development of students, making it possible for them to reach their full potential. The focus in education would be built on student’s past



experiences, resembling Piaget's theory of cognitive systems. This is a phronesis-type of knowledge, where ethical and political perspectives merge (Wahlström, 2016). The last tradition, *social reconstructionism*, sees education as responsible for political and social changes. While in a humanistic tradition, the individual student would be in focus, in a social reconstructionism tradition, education's social context is important (Wahlström, 2016). Close to social reconstructionism lies *techne*, because it is concerned with social knowledge obtained through experience (Wahlström, 2016).

Wahlström's categorization of knowledge can also be said to represent a policy debate between two competing approaches to knowledge in curriculum; *neo-conservative traditionalism* and *technical-instrumentalism* (Young, 2008). The former relating to Scientific Rationalism, and the latter to Social Effectiveness. Neo-conservative traditionalism is as old as the institution of schooling itself, and curricula is here categorized by subject disciplines (Young, 2008). Technical-instrumentalism advocates managerial regulation, performance indicators and target setting in education (Young, 2008). This tradition is concerned with economical questions and preparing for a competitive knowledge society (Young, 2008; Winch, 2014). Young (2008) argues that neo-conservatism is flawed, but not false. It serves to enhance important aspects, such as education being an end in itself and not just as a means to an end. But this approach is not sufficient in itself, as it fails to see that curriculum is and has always been, related to political, social and economic changes (Young, 2008; Winch, 2014).

Technical-instrumentalists are better at acknowledging how political and economic matters links with curricula, although changes to curricula are usually externally 'imposed' and outcomes drives educational policy (Young, 2008). In later years, this tradition has had a major impact on curricula that makes links between subjects and facilitates generic skills that are valuable for employment (Young, 2008). However, some researchers point to the problematic nature of cross-curricular skills; often there is little or no integration of generic skills in learning outcomes that are built on the specific *subjects'* premises and it is not realistic for these skills to unfold similarly in all subjects (Dale, Engelsen, Karseth, 2011). Yates and Young (2010) argue that contemporary curricula does not take in to account the 'differentiatedness of knowledge' (p.8), and that subject disciplines differ in conceptions and in their form of objectivity, which generic and cross-curricular skills and competencies does not necessarily favor.

The knowledge traditions in curricula can also manifest themselves in the classroom. What constitutes knowledge in curricula and what constitutes knowledge in the classroom depends on the choices that have been made (Winch, 2014). Curricula may be subject-based, skills-based, or a mix of both, but behind the policy text lies the choices that has formed it. Teachers can use different traditions either through curriculum implementation, or through own beliefs and perceptions of knowledge. Usually a mix of these would be normal, accompanied by a mix of knowledge traditions (Wahlström, 2016).

## **5.6 Summary**

This chapter has established the analytical framework used for this study. Organizational theory, or organization learning theory was presented. This theory enables the researcher to understand different stages of local implementation of policy, as well as allowing for an understanding of how interpretations of knowledge plays an important role. Theories of different bureaucratic types have been presented, establishing a shift in bureaucratic control in the education sector that resembles elements from the private sector, such as competition, evaluation and school-choice. Accountability and autonomy have been tied up to the new forms of bureaucracy presented by Maroy (2008), raising questions of whether teacher autonomy is threatened in an evaluate state and a quasi-market model. Furthermore, this chapter has presented a theoretical framework of trends of knowledge in curricula by Wahlström (2016), complemented by Young's (2008) terms of neo-conservative traditionalism and technical-instrumentalism. Lastly, a brief description of the importance of standards in education was presented.

# 6 Findings

This chapter will present the data gathered at the two participating schools. The chapter is organized according to research questions and includes the comparative aspect between the two schools, and the two subject disciplines. Data collected through interviews with teachers and principals serves for the main body of this chapter, however they are complemented by observations completed at the two schools.

## 6.1 RQ 1: How do teachers and principals interpret and enact Key Skills within and across school subjects?

To get a scope on how teachers and principals make meaning of the curriculum component Key Skills, all the interviews started with open-ended questions of knowledge and perceptions. Through the insight of perceptions, there was done a comparison between schools – but also between Natural Sciences and Social Sciences. Yates and Young (2010) discuss' how skills-based learning is often cross-curricular and generic, but that some subjects do not necessarily succeed in the implementation of skills, and that in fact, there is a limit to how skills-based teaching can change a subject. To shed light on this issue, interpretations and enactments were compared between subjects. This section presents the eight teachers' and two principals' interpretation and enactment of Key Skills, (T) referred to as teachers and (P) referred to as principals, and the acronyms (S1) for school 1 and (S2) for school 2 are used. The findings from the two schools are presented and compared simultaneously throughout, as well as the comparison between subjects.

### Interpretations

When it came to personal understanding or definition of Key Skills, the participants were asked to go through the skills one by one and explain how they personally understand them. The answers are therefore presented chronologically here, one skill at a time. With **Managing Myself**<sup>1</sup> informants interpreted the skill as being an organized learner that takes responsibility for their own learning:

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<sup>1</sup> Words in bold represent the six different Key Skills from Table 2.

S1T3: The ability to get organized, have your books ready.

S2P: ...students being on time, being organized for class, how I present myself, being respectful, all the basics of what you need to get on to the day to day life.

S1T4: ...students becoming autonomous, self-regulated learners, and take responsibility for their own learning.

This notion was representative for most teachers and principals, and when asked the question the participants went on to describe how they interpreted it in terms of how the students would act if they possess the skill. The skill was by and large tied to self-regulation and being an autonomous learner. There was little or no confusion amongst the participants of what this skill entitles, and none of the informants expressed any challenges with the interpretation of the skill. However, some informants made associations to how Managing Myself relates to other skills in the Key Skills framework and did not necessarily understand the skill as separate to the others. It provided a more holistic understanding of the skill:

S1T2: Managing Myself is kind of...monitoring how I'm Staying Well.

S1T1: Managing Myself and Managing Information and Thinking can be quite similar in that sense of you know, managing my goals, managing my meta learning capabilities, but then Managing myself and Staying well kind of come together in the sense of being organized, having a lunch every day, talking to someone if I'm having a difficulty in school, knowing who I can talk to. Kind of emotional literacy.

S1T3: To me that's kind of linked with Staying Well.

S2P: Managing Myself, it's obviously dog tailed to Staying Well.

It was evident that when participants talked about Managing Myself, it was easy for them to drift the conversation over to talk about the other Key Skills, in particular Staying Well. This was especially evident for informants from school 1. It was found that there were not any great differences between the interpretations of Managing Myself from natural science teachers and social science teachers, or between schools. While Managing Myself was an easy skill to interpret, the great majority of informants had trouble with interpreting Staying Well. This was somewhat surprising as the informants frequently made connections between Staying Well and Managing Myself, but once asked to interpret the skill itself it became difficult to gather a deeper understanding.

The interpretations of **Staying Well** varied between the participants. Two informants referred to the wellbeing of the students:

S1P: Emphasis on wellbeing, both mental and physical.

S1T4: Being healthy, physical and that.

While two teachers and one principal commented on the personal, and social aspect of the skill:

S1T2: I think that's a personal thing...it could be something personal to them; getting up every morning, getting in to school.

S2T2: Staying Well...being social, building relationships.

S2P: It's about building relationships and having positive relationships with others and a sense of wellbeing, not just about myself but with others.

Several participants expressed challenges with understanding Staying Well and the question "what does that even mean?" came up frequently throughout the interviews. These perceptions are representative for both schools, and for teachers from both subject traditions. Although there was confusion about this skill, the notion was a desire to create a positive learning environment for the learners and related this to Staying Well. While doing field work at the two schools, they both underwent training in wellbeing, and the discussion of mental health and youth was frequently debated throughout my stay. There is no doubt that the participants viewed the importance of having Staying Well in the Key Skills framework, but they expressed a desire to a fuller understanding of the use in schools, and in particular subjects. It was found that the skill might be subject-dependent after several of the informants commented on the usage of the skill in PE (Physical Education) class:

S2T1: Staying Well...being healthy, physically, active and safe, well we say we do that in PE.

S1T4: Staying Well is one that I definitely need to work on, I think that we sometimes tend to let the PE teacher, and the Pastoral Care Team, take that.

S2T2: Probably the hardest one to bring in is Staying Well, that obviously fits more in to the PE, the active subject.

This means that the interpretations of Staying Well did not necessarily vary between the two schools, or between teachers from Natural/Social Science, but that teachers perceived the skill as relevant for other active and ethical subjects, and it expresses a notion that Staying Well lends itself better to these subjects. In this case the informants mention PE class repeatedly. Even though all Key Skills are generic and cross-curricular skills, going through the interpretations of Staying Well it became clear that the skills do not necessarily play out similarly in every subject, or at all. For the implementation of this particular skill it became a question of subject, rather than school. The informants understood the importance of having

Staying Well as a Key Skill, but beyond the personal and social aspect of it, they had trouble with understanding *how* it is a skill and how to incorporate it in a typical learning environment.

**Communicating** as a Key Skill was surprisingly interpreted in a highly general and literal sense in both schools. In most cases the participants interpreted ‘communicating’ as a verb, and not necessarily as a skill:

S2T1: They [students] need to be able to listen and express themselves.

S2P: Whether I write well, speak well.

S1T4: Being able to express ideas.

Most informants tied Communicating to the skill Working with Others and used words such as ‘group work’ and ‘pair work’ frequently when talking about the skill. It seemed as these two skills were as interconnected as Managing Myself and Staying Well were described to be, if not even more so. While at times this did get confusing – not understanding whether the informants are talking about Communicating or Working with Others – I believe this contributes to drawing a picture of how the Key Skills are interconnected and sometimes overlapping:

S2T4: Communicating, it’s just working with other people to achieve sometimes separate, but sometimes similar goals.

S1T2: I suppose that when they’re [the students] in their group work, that Communicating is really, really big. They need to communicate with their partner what they’re going to do and how they’re going to carry it out.

Beyond establishing what ‘communicating’ means (if only as a verb) and finding connections to other Key Skills, there was little or no in-depth interpretations of the skill from most participants. The deviating interpretations all came from teachers working in the English department, so the differences in interpretation did not vary much from school to school, rather from subject to subject. This could be because English is the only subject to have gone through the reform in total, while other subjects have not started the implementation process at all. Furthermore, Communicating as a skill has gotten large space in the renewed English curriculum and is said to play an important role in both informal and formal assessments. It was found that English teachers were more equipped to interpret Communicating and went beyond the obvious answers, or interpretations that the skill ‘speaks for itself’ as one informant put it. English teachers commented on various dimensions of the skill:

S1T1: Communicating is about the most accurate way of translating what you are thinking to somebody else, or moving what you are thinking to somebody else. But it’s also the process of making something that is

meaningful to you meaningful to somebody else. And how do you use the skill of language, of presentation, to transfer it to develop meaning for somebody else.

S1T3: Communicating can stay with you for your whole life, that you can get up and speak in front of a crowd, a group and that you can kind of stick to the point, you can be concise when you need to, you know what language is appropriate for whatever it is you're saying. And that you communicate differently depending on who you are talking to.

Other participants who were not part of the English department did also comment on how Communicating would be “a massive one for English” (S2P). When comparing the interpretations from English teachers to teachers of Natural Sciences, the differences were big. Previously it was found that most interpretations of Communicating were general, except from English teachers, but the answers deviate even more from subject to subject. It's not just about whether the teacher gave a general or more in-depth interpretation, it was also found that Communicating might mean something else to a teacher of Natural Sciences than to a Social Science teacher. While we have seen how English teachers interpret the skill, most Natural Science teachers interpreted the skill as something closer to Staying Well, or Managing Myself:

S1T4: What I would understand Communicating would be, would be that students feel safe to ask questions and feel equally safe to answer questions, and that they're able to tell you if they're stuck.

S2T3: With regards to Communicating...when we're communicating in the classroom that students feel safe to ask questions, and if I don't know the answer to it that they make an effort to find the answer.

None of the respondents commented on challenges with having Communicating as Key Skill, however two informants drew lines between different usages in Social sciences and Natural sciences when asked how the skill plays out in their subject:

S1T1: Communicating may be to a math teacher to only emphasize the efficient reporting of a piece of information. Communicating to an English teacher may as I said earlier, incorporate the transference of a feeling or a meaningfulness of a piece of information.

S2T4: Communicating for me in Maths...I know this sounds ridiculous, but literally, excuse me 'how did you do that one?' without joking, and 'thanks very much'. I think in English you can actually practice specific oral communication, presentation based stuff.

While English teachers commented on how to give students a range of communication skills to communicate on different platforms, Natural Science teachers were more concerned with giving the students a safe environment to ask questions and work autonomously. Many of the Natural Science teachers made references to the stress-level in Natural Science classes, like Mathematics, and that communication is here important to eliminate stress factors in the subjects. Consequently, the interpretations varied between subject traditions, and it presented a variety of dimensions to the skill.

**Being Creative** was perhaps the easiest skill for the participants to interpret:

S1T1: The creativity brings in a lot of that special interpretation. So performances, presentation, that kind of responses as well...as the traditional writing and poetry.

S1T3: For me I suppose that is students who maybe think outside the box.

S2T3: Being Creative...you're allowed to work in your own space and create or establish your own way of thinking and coming up with your own ideas.

S2P: Being Creative is that sense of dynamic. And it's not that you have to be a great artist but somewhere in whatever the subjects you do, it could be the way that you use language, it could be the way you manipulate information, an idea, at a good debate or presentation.

The way the skill was described can resemble personal characteristics, and how to develop a certain side in oneself. The challenges with Being Creative were not as obvious as with other Key Skills, however, the general interpretation was that it was dependable on the personality of the teacher. Others commented that one can be limited by their subject:

S1T2: Looking at Being Creative, you can be limited by subject I suppose, by how creative you can be. It also depends on the freedom that you are given by your teacher. If we are going to do a science experiment today, I could just show them on how to do it that would be it, or I can say "look guys, I want to know the answer to this question, how are we going to do it?". So perhaps it is a bit about the person.

S2T4: Being Creative is a really hard one to pin down in Mathematics, and people when they're being dishonest would say "oh, but there's huge scope for being creative", and there is but not always at second level. It's just the reality of it. And some say Maths is a beautiful symphony of this and that, and it can be, but not when you're teaching the fundamentals of algebra.

S1T4: As in Being Creative, I suppose in Maths its one that we really need to push being creative in, because it can fall in to a very strict routine of here's a question and here we go.

The interpretation of Being Creative did not vary between schools. The general notion was that the skill could be difficult to implement according to teacher personality (whether the teacher allows the students to be creative or is creative themselves) and according to subject. Mathematics came through as a subject where Being Creative is difficult to enact. Hence, the differences shine through in enactment, and the section on enactment will come back to this.

**Working with Others** was found to be one of the Key Skills' that was most frequently used in both schools. This became evident both from the interviews and the observations. Although without explicit references to the Key Skills framework, all the classes that were observed bared elements of this skill. There was unison in how the participants interpreted the skill, across schools and across subjects:

S1T2: Group work. Oral communication, verbal communication or written communication.



S1P: Developing relationships with other people, developing the kind of skills to be part of a team, sometimes leading sometimes not leading.

S2P: Working with Others is all about group work, being respectful to others in how you work and being mindful of other people's needs. And the skills that you need to work with others.

The interpretations evolved around group work or pair work and how one works well in these environments. However, the participants expressed that it is not necessarily only about a classroom-based activity that has group-or pair work, but also in a more general sense, of how one acts in relation to others on a day-to-day basis, be it in school, at work or in another arena where one has encounters with other people. The word 'respect' and 'being respectful' came up in several interviews when asked to interpret Working with Others. In a way, this can be tied to personal characteristics, or even *manners* – how to behave well in relation to other people. These interpretations resemble descriptions of real-life usage of skills, and several respondents made explicit references to how Working with Others go beyond the school walls:

S2T1: Working with Others; as kind of preparing them for life.

S2T2: Working with Others – getting to know each other. This KS is designed so when they leave the classroom, and go out in to the world, in to the working world – whatever they're going to do, that they're gonna have to learn to work with other people.

S1T3: Working with Others, I mean, most people are going to work with people in one way or another in their lives, and you might be using that skill without even knowing it, and probably most people are, but I think it's needed to get through life in a positive way, for growth and I suppose to be a good colleague or student.

S1T4: I would think that Working with Others is so important for students when they leave school. Maybe they're going straight in to industry, or straight in to work – they have to be able to work with others. It is very important to me that they [students] are able to function as citizens outside of school and go in to the working world and be able to do these skills, especially Working with Others.

There was unison between schools and across subjects that Working with Others is an essential skill for students to hold as they leave school and go out in to the 'real' world. Many made connections to future working life. The informants did not express challenges with interpreting and understanding the skill. However, Working with Others was interpreted by some informants from School 1 as being a difficult skill for Junior Cycle students to learn. They made references to the maturity level of Junior Cycle students:

S1T1: A difficult skill to develop, especially in Junior Cycle...the idea of appreciating that someone of your own age can have a perspective that may be valuable to you, is difficult for them [the students] at that age, I think that's much easier for adults.

S1T4: I think it would depend on the class that is in front of you. There would be a group of students that you could tell them to work as a group, and they're done. But there might be another group that you have to assign roles to, and you kind of have to sit and monitor them.

Working with Others was found to be frequently used in all subjects observed at both schools. The informants did not express any challenges in the interpretation of the skill, and differences did not come through between schools or subjects. The challenges that were identified were in relation to Junior Cycle students, their maturity level and willingness to learn the skill. Although, this finding can only be tied to School 1, as the informants from School 2 did not mention this issue.

Lastly, **Managing Information and Thinking** is another skill that came through as frequently used at both schools. This was evident from interviews and observations. None of the informants expressed challenges in interpreting the skill, but there were however contrasting interpretations. Two teachers from School 1 interpret the skill as something close to adaptation:

S1T2: I give them tasks and based on the information that I give them, they process the information and apply it to something.

S1T4: The ability to use information across curricula or across strata of a curricula.

While some informants define Managing Information and Thinking as something similar to how they interpreted the skill Managing Myself:

S1T4: How you organize your thoughts about a topic, maybe in terms of revision; what is important that I need to know at the end of a lesson.

S2T1: Managing Information and Thinking would be to be aware of what you know, what you want to know and how you are going to find out.

S1T3: They are managing information...for example 'oh my locker key has gone missing, what do I do next?', being able to think about possible solutions.

Although the interpretations above resemble Managing Myself, it also entitles some separate dimensions, such as activities directly tied to learning; gathering information, research and using certain analysis patterns. It is the sense of self-awareness that overlaps with Managing Myself, but it builds on this further by incorporating elements of the learning process. It is about how you use that self-awareness to reach your goals, and to understand all the steps you have to take in-between. Managing Myself is especially tied to personal goals, like wellbeing (which is where it overlaps with Staying Well), but it is not as specifically tied to research and analysis as Managing Information and Thinking is. Managing Information and Thinking can well be used to analyze and discuss something inside school, but also to process the large set of information that a knowledge society comes with. The differences in interpretation were not exclusive for any school or subject. They varied across schools and subjects and can be said to

be one of the skills that offered the most individual interpretations. While it wasn't evident that there were challenges with interpreting the skill, the interpretations were found to easily overlap with interpretations of other skills, which can also be seen in earlier findings presented in this chapter.

## **Enactments**

The Key Skills that came up as most frequently used in both schools were Managing Information and Thinking and Working with Others, whereas the latter one was observed in every single class. Regardless of school, these two skills were described by the teachers as the ones they personally felt they enacted on a daily basis. Observations done of the same teachers proved this to be right; elements of both skills were highly present between the two schools. Further on, nearly all informants (teachers and principals) saw difficulties in enacting some of the Key Skills. The overall trend was the difficulties with the interpretation and enactment of Staying Well. With an exception of one teacher, none of the informants felt they incorporated the skill 'well enough' in their lessons. As seen previously, this was backed up by references to how the skill works better in other subjects, such as PE and Ethical Education, and didn't necessarily have much space in neither Natural Sciences nor Social Sciences. Observations showed that Staying Well did not come up once explicitly in any of the classes, but that certain elements described by the teachers were present, such as creating a safe-place for the students. When asked how Staying Well is enacted in their classroom, teachers provided these answers:

S2T2: With bringing in Staying Well...you try and teach them about being social and be safe in the world that they're going out to. I try to encourage positivity in the classroom.

S1T4: Although I tend to forget about Staying Well, I would always aim to have a positive atmosphere in my classroom.

S1T2: I do find the Staying Well one hard to kind of embed in my lessons. Personally, I always try and make sure that all my students are well, and I greet them at the door every day and I ask them how they are...but beyond that I find it hard to do and do I reach my Staying Well Key Skills in every class? Probably not if I would be very honest.

S2T3: Where do I show Staying Well in my lessons? ... Maybe it's just checking with students and see how their day goes, and how their day is going, and I do do that. But if I was asked where it was I would be wondering, too. I just wouldn't be sure.

There was a lack of enactment of the skill Staying Well, both in Natural and Social Sciences, and in both schools, and the general notion was that other subjects such as PE would be more responsible for implementing the skill. However, the extent of which some Key Skills are more

present in some subjects than others goes beyond Staying Well. Several informants with a Social Science background pinpointed Communicating and Being Creative as important in their subjects. Other informants that did not have the same subject background backed up this notion, and the skills were highly present during observations i.e. an oral presentation in an English class and practicing interviewing skills in an Irish class. As has been previously mentioned, Communicating plays an important role in the new English curriculum:

S1T4: I suppose with the classroom based assessment in English now, they have a huge role to play in students being able to communicate, and becoming more confident in presenting.

While there were insignificant differences between the Social Science subjects (English, History, Irish), the differences grew bigger between Natural Sciences. Informants with a Natural Science background believed Managing Information and Thinking were easy to enact. As well as Working with Others:

S2T1: Managing Information and Thinking, I think the gathering, recording, evaluating information and data...to me that's very Maths and Science. It seems to work perfectly for Science in particular

S1T2: Working with Others – we do lots of group work in my classes [NS].

S2T3: Working with Others, that happens in all my lessons because I suppose in Science you're always gonna have group work, and we're always gonna have experiments or we're always got discussions. So Working with Others is important in Science.

A quick comparison between Social Sciences and Natural Sciences show that some Key Skills are more present than others, for instance Communicating in Social Sciences and Managing Information and Thinking in Natural Sciences. It becomes interesting when there are variations even *within* the Natural Science subjects. Several respondents expressed Science as the 'lead subject' for implementing Key Skills:

S2T3: I think Key Skills work very well in a Science classroom.

S2P: I think Science would be quite strong in it [Key Skills], because they again have lots of different things coming together and they do their experiments and they are looking at different interpretations of analysis and research.

S1T2: Key Skills is a huge thing in Science, like Being Creative – we like to get them [the students] to design their own experiments, work with others.

Nearly all informants with a Natural Science background taught both Mathematics and Science. While there was a notion that Science favored the enactment of Key Skills, comparing it to a Mathematics classroom the impressions changed. At times, during the observations in Math classes, the Key Skills Framework was rarely present. It was found that the teaching was highly

content-based, although with a few Key Skills elements such as Working with Others and Managing Information and Thinking. The differences between a Natural Science classroom and a Social Science classroom were noticeable in the skills the teachers emphasized, yes, but the differences between a Science and a Mathematics classroom were at times greater. While there was an overload of Key Skills present in the Science classrooms, it was at times difficult to recognize them in a Mathematics class. Some teachers saw Mathematics as a subject where “you’re either right or wrong” and added:

S2T4: In Mathematics I think there’s a certain amount of content knowledge and you need to offer this to the student. It has to be a mix between content and skills, but in Mathematics I can never get away from content.

S2T3: I would say I do more group work in Science than what I do in Maths. Because Maths is very like the student has to be able to do certain things, writing stuff down. Whereas with Science I suppose it’s easier to do group work.

The impression of enacting Key Skills in Mathematics showed certain challenges, and the informants tied this to the nature of the subject. A few Key Skills came up as especially difficult to enact in a Mathematics classroom; Communicating and Being Creative. Like previously seen, the Key Skill Communicating was interpreted different between subjects. Mathematic teachers expressed that Communicating would be enacted in the sense that students ask questions and that it becomes part of group work or pair work. With Being Creative the challenges of enactment were again connected to the nature of the subject; informants ask themselves ‘how creative can you be when learning algebra?’ (S2T4). The informants explained that they might find it easy to be creative in their teaching style, but when it comes to getting the students to be creative in Mathematics class it can become more challenging. What most Mathematic teachers who participated aimed to do was to let the students solve problems in a number of ways – and this was the most used method for Being Creative. They also expressed a desire and willingness to better enact Key Skills in their Mathematics classrooms. Observations at School 2 did show a pronounced effort in Mathematics to bring in Key Skills, and this also came through during the interviews. The informants explained they were working towards adopting the Key Skill’s in to their own teaching by trying to understand how exactly they fit in.

In some ways, this is where the problem lies – how does Key Skills fit in to every subject? Together with the differences in interpretation, the differences in focus, usability and enactment in certain subjects it forms an impression that there is a need to understand Key Skills as subject- and context dependable:

S1T1: If there was a wheel of each skills, and in English we could say we are looking at this part of Communicating, and in Maths they would say we are looking at this part of a whole – that might be more efficient.

S2P: I think every teacher concentrates on all [Key Skills] to a degree, but in some contexts and in some areas of particular courses, certain Key Skills come in to play more than others.

### **6.1.1 Summary**

The most apparent interpretations and enactments with Key Skills were descriptions of higher order thinking, self-regulation and adaptation, but also a training in developing personal characteristics that are deemed valuable, such as working well with others. It was found that the two schools for the most part had similar interpretations and classroom enactments. The small differences between the two field work schools are evident in the interpretation of Working with Others; where teachers from School 1 believed this skill to be challenging for Junior Cycle students because of maturity level. Further on, informants from School 1 were found to interpret the Key Skills in a more interconnected way – their interpretations of individual skills often overlapped with others. However, the comparison between two Junior Cycle schools proved to be less useful in the area of interpretation and individual classroom enactment.

The most deviating interpretations and enactments shine through between subject disciplines. Staying Well was found to be subject-dependable to active and ethical subjects such as PE. Communicating was interpreted differently by English and Natural Science teachers – the latter interpreted the skill as something to do with creating a safe environment to learn. Communicating, together with Being Creative, was found to be some of the skills that were most used in a Social Science classroom, while Natural science teachers expressed Managing Information and Thinking, and Working with Others as more usable for their subjects. That Communicating came up as frequently used in English classroom can well be because it is the only subject to have gone through the reform in full and Communicating has been a major focus in English. Mathematic teachers expressed trouble in enacting the most used Key Skills in a social science classroom, and that in general, the Key Skills Framework might be easier to enact in a Science classroom rather than in Mathematics. That Science was found to be a subject actively enacting the Key Skills Framework can support other research on the field, the subject is often said to be at the forefront of skills-based learning (P21, n.d.). Lastly, Being Creative was described by some informants (regardless of school and subjects) to be dependable on the teachers' personality.

It is evident that both schools and both subject disciplines use the Key Skills Framework together with other, more content-based teaching. Hence, the enactment can show that there is a hybrid of scientific rationalism and social effectiveness (Wahlström, 2016). The Key Skills Framework is a cross-curricular framework with generic skills. Although the intention is for these skills to work across subjects, the informants at the two schools show that the Key Skills Framework do not necessarily function as generic, neither in the interpretation of them nor in the practical enactment. This shows evidence of a gap between an intended and an implemented curriculum (Goodlad et al, 1979; Lundgren, 1979). Some subjects had an easier job in ‘transforming’ their own subject to better implement the Key Skills Framework, while others lacked this ability. With this in mind, the next chapter will show what schools can do when a framework like Key Skills does not fit in to established subjects.

## **6.2 RQ 2: How are Key Skills integrated within teaching at two lower secondary schools in Ireland?**

To answer how the two field work schools have integrated the Key Skills framework in their daily practice, both observations and interviews became necessary. The two methods supplemented each other to draw a picture of whole-school Key Skill initiatives. Because of the nature of the research question, the comparative aspect is here solely between the two schools, not between subject traditions. The two initiatives are presented separately, first School 2 then School 1, with a brief comparison in the summary at the end.

### **6.2.1 Key Skills Initiatives at Two Local Schools**

How schools enact the Key Skills Framework can shine through in classrooms not only by teaching methods, but also in the way the school have integrated the curriculum. Ireland is still in the early phase of curriculum implementation, and several subjects have not undergone the reform. However, the two participating schools had developed certain Key Skills initiatives that were partly-or fully integrated in to their daily practice. The informants were asked to describe the process of the work towards integrating Key Skills, and observations complemented their reflections.

The New Curriculum for Junior Cycle has the curriculum component *Short Courses*. Schools are free to design their own short courses, or implement the ones designed by the NCCA, such

as Chinese or Coding. The short courses are designed to last for around 100 hours and run somewhat in a cross-curricular matter. School 2 has chosen to implement some of the short courses but had additionally designed their own interdisciplinary subjects that would run like a 'normal' subject, not limited by time. The school has developed four of these subjects: Performing Arts, STEM, Social and Cultural Studies and Enterprise. The aim was to create subjects where the teachers aren't working to an actual designed syllabus, lifting the boundaries from subjects and work in *themes*, rather than subjects:

S2P: It's about ensuring that our students instead of our learning being dictated by a program, it's more about 'let's explore water!', and doing that in different ways in several subjects.

The principal and teachers at the school described working in a highly multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary way in these subjects. The four subjects are designed locally, hence, teachers work towards a locally defined core kind of learning area. Two or more of these subjects would usually work connected to learn about a theme, issue or topic that wouldn't be adequately addressed by one subject alone. For instance, the theme 'environmental issues' that can be explored from a STEM point of view as much as from Social and Cultural Studies. The subjects run for all three levels at Junior Cycle; First Years, Second Years and Third Years. First Years and Second Years are offered four classes a week, and Third Years are offered three classes. The students can choose which subject they want to follow.

The process of setting these four subjects up was done by around 19 teachers (and the principal) out of 34 teachers at the school. The school set aside time, one afternoon a week to be precise, to work in teams to develop theme-based learning. Different teams of teachers were assigned to different groups. There is a random selection of teachers who work on the four subjects, a mix of established teachers and new teachers. The group of teachers who teach and work on the interdisciplinary subjects rotate, so that every teacher in the school can be a part of the initiative. The principal explained that the teachers experience more freedom as they are not covering a centrally defined syllabus and are freer to nurture the Key Skills. The Key Skills Framework seem to go hand-in hand with the four subjects developed by the school and teachers expressed it as being easy to enact and integrate it to the four subjects:

S2T4: In STEM we're trying to really nail what the students need to know and what are the things we expect them to have done, or what's the sort of process versus the content. We may be gone more towards the actual skills there and away from content as much.

S2T1: I feel a lot of my classes are very skills-based, even in my learning intentions. Performing Arts is quite skills-based, it's a lot of doing and being practical. I don't know if Performing Arts would even exist if we



didn't have the new Junior Cycle and this focus on Key Skills. 'Cause Key Skills in Performing Arts would be hitting skills that other subjects don't really cover enough.

In the question of how Key Skills fit in to the established routines at the school, the principal and teachers explained that not only do they fit in, but through the integration of the four interdisciplinary subjects the staff are slowly moving in to integrating it in the remaining subjects as well. This was exactly the principal's aim – to ensure that teachers' practice would be inspired by working in a more generic sense.

While School 1 had also introduced some short courses, they had an additional way of integrating Key Skills to their practice. This initiative evolves more around assessment of the Key Skills and was provided by the iPad software VSWare. VSWare is a school administration platform that covers everything from attendance, assessments and behavior, and has grown to be leading in Irish schools. It is collaborative and interactive, and at the School 1 all teachers and the principal had access to it, as well as students and parents. The webpage of VSWare promotes the software by saying it “provides collaborative data management and innovative reporting tools giving school management, administration, teachers and parents the ability to monitor and improve the progress of their students and a real-time view of school activity” (VSWare, n.d. first para.). Other than giving teachers, students and parents an overview of attendance and learning material, it also had a way of assessing the Key Skills. One teacher explained the usage of the software at the school like this:

S1T2: It's basically a positive and negative point-based system. For example if a student was Communicating very well in class, they would get five points on VS. That's how we say 'okay, you're going to get five points today, well done, because you're Working with Others – excellent, that's five points'. There could be minus five points for lack of participation, so they are not working with their peers. Or it could be destructive behavior, so they are not Managing themselves, that's minus five. Then at the end of the month a prize goes to the person in the class with the highest VS points. It's also nice for parents to keep on top. It's instant as well.

Teachers were able to give the students positive or negative points on the software, based on the categories in Table 7. These categories are partly shaped by the Key Skills Framework (KS refer to the skills in the framework) and some are developed within the school. The software provided something similar to a student “profile”, and teachers could click on a student's name and see a complete record of their points. The points are presented in a pie chart with green or red colors – green signaling positive VS points and red signaling negative points. When giving these points, teachers fill in the subject and class where the points were given and can choose to add a comment. The students have access to their own “profile”, as well as parents, every teacher in the school and the principal. By clicking on the red or green colors in the pie

chart, one was able to see which kind of points were given, why and in which class. See below for a visual example.

Positive Points	Negative Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being Creative (KS)</li> <li>• Class Participation</li> <li>• Exemplary Homework</li> <li>• Great Communicating (KS)</li> <li>• Managing information &amp; thinking (KS)</li> <li>• Managing myself (KS)</li> <li>• Perfect weekly attendance</li> <li>• Presentation of work</li> <li>• Showing leadership skills</li> <li>• Sin I gaeilge</li> <li>• Staying well (KS)</li> <li>• Working with others (KS)</li> <li>• You spotted maths! (spot math in other subjects)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disruptive behavior</li> <li>• Eating in class</li> <li>• Incorrect uniform</li> <li>• Lack of participation</li> <li>• Late to class</li> </ul>

Table 7: Point system in VSWare at School 1 (elaborated by researcher).

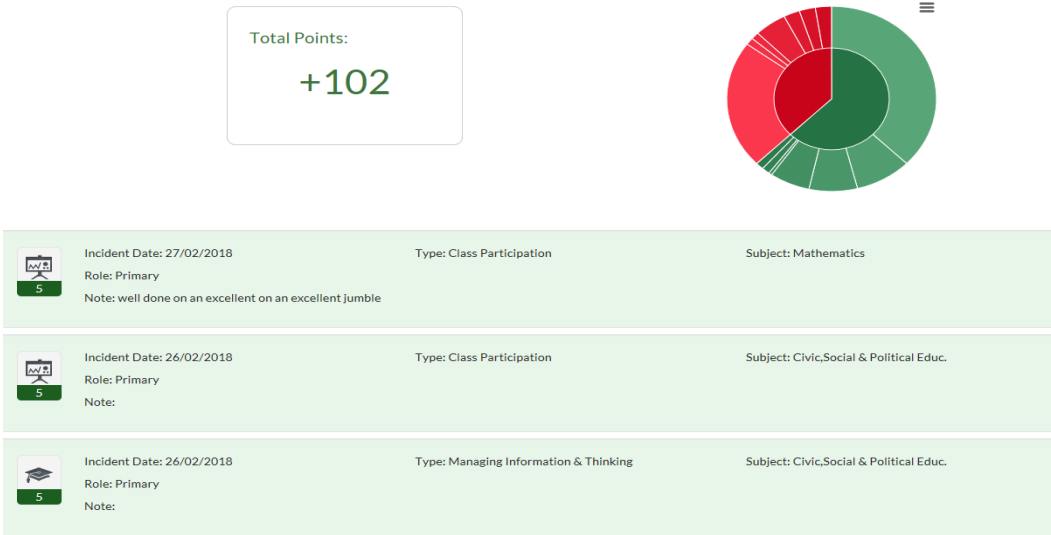


Figure 5: Picture of VSWare points. Provided by School 1

When asked how the school had developed this form of Key Skills/behavioral assessment tool, they expressed that it was “part of the software” (S1P), but that staff wished to use a software that corresponds to the Key Skills. The addition of other categories has been done continuously,

for instance during a time period with emphasis on numeracy the category “you spotted math!” was created by the Mathematics department at the school. It seemed as the categories were added after discussions in the subject departments, but that a development of standards attached to these points and categories had not been developed.

During the observations it was obvious that the software was used continuously through the school day. Several points, negative and positive, were given throughout the classes that were observed, and you could often hear the phrase “sorry, you are not Communicating well today, X, that’s minus five VS points” or “well done, X, you’re being creative today, five VS points!”. All the teachers that were observed kept a record on their blackboard and registered it to VSWare after the class was done. While I observed how much the points-system was used, it was difficult not to ask the question of standards. The VS points were given at a rapid pace, often it did not take more than one second for a teacher to give out the positive or negative points. Through the interviews and the observations, it became clear that there was a lack of uniformity on how to give these points and the informants expressed that there had not really been developed a standard-setting tool for the points system:

S1T3: And I think as well when we started bringing in the VSWare positive points for using their skills, sometimes it was hard to judge when to give the points for it. I think we’re still learning.

S1T4: It’s an area that we could work on to sort of make sure that that happens – the same language or the same goals across the school.

S1T1: Key Skills are a cross-curricular idea, and if you want to develop cross-curricular skills...unless teachers are using the same success criteria and the same language that doesn’t work.

When asked how the Key Skills Framework was assessed in Ireland, nearly all informants referred to informal, summative assessment. Going beyond the VSWare assessment tool, some informants expressed difficulties with assessing the Key Skills:

S2T4. It’s very, very easy to assess content knowledge – simple. Whereas assessing Key Skills, like we gave them an example in class, Working with Others, is getting well with others good enough or do you need to actually work well then where’s your proof that you work well with other people? Judging whether or not it’s been effective. I can implement them [Key Skills], no problem at all, but I don’t know whether I’ve implemented them well. That’s really where it’s a trick.

S1T3: It’s hard to measure like exactly how someone has improved, or how their skill has been developing.

S2P: It is very hard to measure some of those, and one could argue that you would never be able to measure them. For instance, Staying Well is not as easy to kind of manage, or the sense of wellbeing, is very hard for that to come through in a written paper that’s three years down the line or whatever. Whether we can assess Key Skills as in you have 80%, I’m not sure... I’d say we are a long way from that.

The measurement of Key Skills was found to be a grey area for all informants. The skills were described to be difficult to assess, and the way School 1 had integrated an assessment tool through VSWare gave proof to the challenges in assessment. It works as an example of the challenges in assessing the skills, and the importance of having a pre-set standard setting tool within the school.

### **6.2.2 Summary**

The two local schools have both started the process of integrating the Key Skills Framework to their daily practice. School 1 have done so by using the software VSWare to assess the Key Skills', and School 2 has locally designed and developed four interdisciplinary subjects that worked thematically; STEM, Performing Arts, Enterprise and Social and Cultural Studies. These four subjects worked in a highly skills-based way, and the informants were able to implement the Key Skills Framework more than in other, already existing subjects. These interdisciplinary subjects were implemented additionally to short courses – that also incorporate a great deal of skills-based learning.

School 1 had also implemented short courses but had not developed any interdisciplinary subjects such as School 2. The integration of the Key Skills Framework in School 1 evolved around the use of technology to assess the Key Skills. Through the use of the iPad software VSWare, teachers and parents were able to monitor the behavior of the students, giving them positive and/or negative points on the Key Skills and other categories. A few challenges with the point system arose when it became clear that the school had not developed standards in unison, and that assessing the Key Skills in general was a difficult task. Further on, the use of this software gave the students a personalized profile that in turn created a sense of individualization – the teachers were able to see the students 'every need'. The student's behavior became calculable and comparable, and left a focus on the future needs for a student group, or an individual student. What implications this has for students, an education system and bureaucracy will be discussed in Chapter 7.

### **6.3 RQ3: How do teachers at two lower secondary schools in Ireland understand their autonomy in regard to Key Skills?**

The shift to a post-bureaucratic education system describes a development towards performance management, responsibility and accountability (Maroy, 2008). Different forms of assessment tools play an important role in a post-bureaucracy, but how does the focus on skills-based learning affect teacher autonomy and bureaucracy systems in education? To understand how Irish teachers and principals perceive their own autonomy with Key Skills, the informants were asked questions related to individual freedom and freedom from coercion and were asked to describe their own role in the implementation of the Key Skills Framework. They were later asked about local and national incentives for the implementation of Key Skills.

The first problem that arose for this study was the industrial dispute within a teacher union in Ireland. The dispute happened prior to collecting the data and was triggered by several problems; one of them being aspects of the New Junior Cycle Reform. The teacher union withheld co-operation that led to a delay in the implementation of the new curriculum, including Key Skills. There are two prominent teacher unions in Ireland, whereas one opposed the new reform while the other gave teachers the opportunity to receive training and begin the implementation. One principal explained that:

S1P: There has been a huge union opposition. An awful lot. The majority of schools have not cooperated with the New Junior Cycle at all. The majority schools in this context can be divided in two depending on teacher unions. One of the unions, including the one that is predominant here, allowed teachers to engage with all of this reform, including the Key Skills. The other union said no, you can not engage, you cannot go to CPD [teacher training], you cannot have discussions about it in staff meetings, you cannot do anything. That has only changed six weeks ago on the first of September.

One can read something very significant in to the industrial dispute. First, it became clear that the change to a skills-based education system and the changes in assessment were opposed and not received well by local schools. Some of the issues were related to an increase in workload and pressure on teachers, the impact of the classroom-based assessments and the lack of clarity on some of the new areas such as ‘wellbeing’ (Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland [ASTI], n.d.). Further on, the dispute centered around discussions of increasement in testing and bureaucracy, and that it took away focus from actual learning (ASTI, n.d.).

However, the two schools that participated in this study were not represented by the teacher union that led the dispute. When asked questions concerning their own autonomy with the Key Skills the two schools were mainly positive. In the question of how they perceive their latitude and freedom with the implementation of Key Skills in a more general sense, the informants expressed a high degree of autonomy:

S2T4: We are very autonomous in the classroom, Irish teachers, I think more so than other nations. I would say pretty much we've been directed towards them [Key Skills], we've been given advice, we've been shown this is maybe where they come in to the curriculum and then it's pretty much up to us.

S1T2: Teachers have free range, completely of Key Skills. There's nothing really holding us back.

Several teachers from School 1 explained how they perceived their autonomy with Key Skills within the school, attributing the management of the school for providing freedom to act:

S1T1: I really can push Key Skills, because of the support of the management in the school, the ethos of the school is very skills-driven.

S1T4: I feel like an awful lot of autonomy with Key Skills. I feel we have a really nice amount of autonomy in this school and that's what's nice about this school, I feel we are very supported here.

These perceptions of autonomy relate mostly to the interpretation and enactment of Key Skills. Teachers believed they were given great autonomy in their own classrooms, as to how to teach the skills, both from national and local authorities. The informants were later asked how they perceived their autonomy prior to – and after the implementation of Key Skills. The general notion at both schools was that the shift to the New Junior Cycle had opened up and increased their autonomy in the classrooms:

S2T3: I do think it's more free than what the old Junior Cycle was, I think it's now based on trusting the teacher.

S1T3: I think we are trusted with it, before it was kind of really put on us. And I think now we are trusted with it, we are given a lot of space to judge for ourselves.

Because the counterpart of autonomy is often described to be accountability (as described in Chapter 5.3), the informants were also asked about national and local stakes with the implementation of Key Skills. Many informants reflected upon different forms of control, or accountability, that is present in the Irish education system and can be impacted by the Key Skills Framework. The descriptions of accountability, or performance management systems, were centered around *public accountability*, *professional accountability* and *personal accountability* (Sinclair, 1995). Two teachers, one from each field work school, explicitly identified personal and professional accountability with Key Skills:

S1T3: I suppose there's more of a personal thing that you know, maybe you'd feel disappointed that maybe either you didn't help them as much as you could, or, you should've pushed them [the Key Skills] more.

S2T1: For me it's more about I have to think about the students and what they need, and just 'cause they got an A they could be sitting back of the class not talking to anyone for the whole year, like that's not great. It's more of a personal thing for me, rather than results [of Key Skills].

These answers provide a picture that these two accountability systems may at times be overlapping – there was no clear boundary between the two and teachers used professional and personal descriptions of accountability at the same time. For these two teachers, personal accountability and professional accountability was the most evident form of accountability within the use of Key Skills. Although there were only two teachers who identified these forms of accountability in an explicit way, other teachers from both participating schools explained they felt a great professional, and at time personal, responsibility for the students. However, this had mostly to do with the wellbeing of the student and in that many participant teachers felt they had a great responsibility in ensuring that students had a satisfactory experience of school. Hence, coding of these accountability categories was restricted to only encompass professional and personal accountability towards the Key Skill Framework and left two findings linked to them. Moreover, a great majority of participants from both schools gave descriptions of public accountability tied to the Key Skills Framework. Within the descriptions of public accountability there were three categories identified: 1) school inspections, 2) pressure from parents, and 3) the results on the Leaving Certification exam.

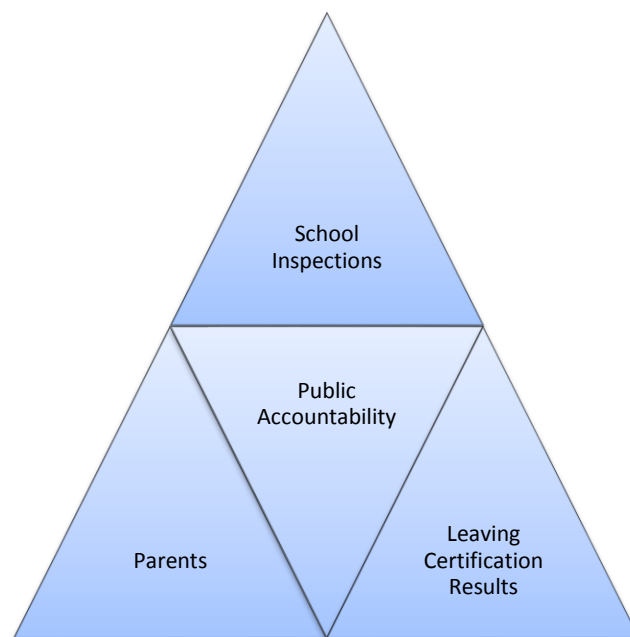


Figure 6: The different forms of public accountability described by informants. Elaborated by researcher.

## School Inspections

There are three different school inspections in Ireland; a *formal subject inspection* where the schools get a week's notice and one specific subject is inspected, a *whole school inspection* where several subjects are inspected and different policy aspects at the same time, and lastly, an *incidental inspection* (called drive-bys by Irish teachers) where the inspector can randomly pick teachers and classes to observe as long as they arrive before 08:15 in the morning. In the first two cases there is a formal report written which is later published online. Informants explained that Key Skills can be part of these inspections:

S1T3: Key Skills would be embedded in the inspections. They would be looking for that, and they would comment on it, whether they're being used at all or used well.

S2T2: I would say it would be very explicit in that 'right, how are you incorporating all the Key Skills?', and the subject inspections per say 'how are you incorporating these?', I'd say it would be one of the first things that they'd look for.

S1T1: We do have school evaluations, we have department inspections and they would be very much looking for the teaching of Key Skills. That would be a real benchmark.

The formal report is published online where the public can access it. There is a complete record of older reports too. Teachers were asked about the public reports, and two teachers from School 2 expressed that they frequently checked school reports, both as professionals and for other matters:

S2T1: When I'm applying to a new teaching job I always check the reports of the school online beforehand.

S2T4: I have kids and when we were deciding their schools we went online to compare school reports.

As Mausethagen (2015) explains, it is important to determine whether teachers experience being held responsible as forced, a form of control, or whether they perceive it as a way to progress and improve as professionals. The overall notion was that teachers and principals from both schools were positive towards being held accountable through school inspections:

S2P: If an inspector came in and felt that we were weak of Key Skills, they would make a report and they would advise me the principal and the board that they need to do more. Is that a big stake? Yes, nobody likes to get recommendations that might say you weren't doing it right. But is it the end of the world? No, it's meant to be an improvement.

S1T3: I think it's just, you know anyone who is a teacher expects at some stage they're gonna get a couple of inspections, and I think that's fine.

S2T1: I don't really mind. If someone came in to my class to inspect, I would like to know what I need to improve on. I'm not afraid of being held accountable.



S2T3: Inspections don't bother me at all.

S1P: The accountability would in the first instance be through the inspectors, and they would visit schools and they would issue a report to the end of it. Obviously, you see there is accountability there, schools do take it seriously. People do want to get good reports. But I think it's essential. You have to have it. It has to be done. It's a good type of pressure.

Although informants from both schools expressed positivity towards school inspections, and some even wished to be held more accountable by the inspectors and reports, this changed when an actual inspection was notified to one of the field work schools. Towards the end of field work at School 2, the school was notified that a formal subject inspection for English would take place in the near future. Informants that had previously expressed during interviews that they did not mind school inspections, some even desired them, were now changing opinions. One teacher expressed that he/she was "very nervous", and that a lot of preparation would take place prior to the inspection. Although this valuable observation from the staffroom does not change the data collected through interviews, it paints a picture that the participants might only have expressed positivity in the interviews because they felt pressured to. This, in itself, is a form of accountability. The inspection report was published online a few months later, and the school received excellent comments.

## Parents

The public inspection reports are part of a *public accountability*. Informants from School 2 identified another form of public accountability, parents, and described they at times felt pressured by parents to teach in a certain way. Parents can be said to be a form of public accountability because they are interested community groups, as described by Sinclair (1995). Teachers at School 2 believed a focus on skills-learning in general was not received well by parents, as they would usually be concerned with their children passing exams. This did in turn mean that their teaching at times had to be limited to more content-based learning. The way the teachers described this form of accountability portrayed a picture of how Key Skills in reality has not been embedded in full in Irish schools, yet:

S2T2: When you have parent-teacher meeting, and you have mom and dad coming in and going 'well, how close are they to having the content covered? How close are they to doing revision?'. They [parents] tend not to be really too worried about if they're [students] picking up Key Skills, you know it's more content. I think parents will more look upon, Communicating and Working with Others or Staying Well, but that's our [the parents] job, you [teachers] have to teach.

S2T4: Their parents think that's what matters the most in school, marks and results, and how much homework a kid gets determines whether you're a good teacher. Where Key Skills is looking far more for meaning and abilities in students. It can sometimes limit you in your skills teaching.

Teachers from School 2 referred to an additional way of parents holding teachers and schools accountable; in Ireland, parents (and students) can report teachers to the teaching council if they feel they are unfit to practice. One teacher reflected upon how Key Skills may be part of a report like this:

S2T2: Any child or parent can report, they go to the teaching council, the teaching council investigate the matter; "right, on what grounds do you want to report this?". Obviously, there are kids in this school whose parents are teachers and who will be enquiring as to our teaching Key Skills. All this coming in to the curriculum now and if you don't teach it; why not. There would be a pressure on you make sure that you are including this [Key Skills] in some plans.

Teachers at School 2 saw the influence from parents as somewhat pressuring their own teaching autonomy. Relating the data to Mausethagen (2015), this means that informants from School 2 experience it as a form of control, and not as a way of evolving as professionals. However, Key Skills might not be the issue if we are to analyze the informants' answers. It is the old system prior to the New Junior Cycle Reform that is perceived by the teachers as being what parents would hold teachers accountable of, and that the Key Skills Framework and the new changes is supposed to move away from this form of accountability. This resembles the perceptions of the last identified form of accountability, the Leaving Cert results.

## **Leaving Certification Results**

The Leaving Certificate is a terminal, external exam at the end of secondary school in Ireland. Students who take the Leaving Cert are usually between 16 to 20 year old. Although this terminal exam is at the end of Senior Cycle (upper secondary), the students are prepared from Junior Cycle level where they also have to take a Junior Certificate Examination, and an optional Transition Year. Teachers from School 2, as well as the principal, described the Leaving Cert as being one way of holding teachers accountable:

S2T2: It can kind of pull you. It comes back, and unfortunately, it shouldn't, but it comes back to exam results and if exam results that I produce this year from the third years are poor, does that reflect on me as a teacher? There's always kind of subconscious at the back of your mind in that, unfortunately the emphasis is still on results.

S2P: I think the autonomy in the one hand it is limited. Because we still have this terminal exam, both at Leaving Cert, which we have enormous emphasis on. So I think that kind of would say takes away some of the autonomy that you could have. In a sense I think that it will be difficult to get the teachers to feel they have

autonomy, for as long as there is an enormous amount of subjects that they're gearing up the students for the formal exam.

S2T4: There are schools in Ireland, say we both teach Maths, at the end of the year the scores of your class on the Leaving Cert would be put up in the staff room besides scores from my class. Ireland has that in its history and it's...so you do everything and you are judged, you are a score between 0 and 300 at the end, or 600 at the end of six years of education. And I think the Key skills is to try and get away from all of that.

These descriptions understand Key Skills as a way of transforming the education system in to becoming less results-based, and in that holding teachers less accountable through exam results and/or parents. It is the old system that is perceived as gearing more towards accountability, and that the new ideas of the reform and Key Skills are to open up for more teacher autonomy. The external exam, the Leaving Cert, is perceived as setting a boundary on teachers to teach the Key Skills Framework. Several teachers from both schools expressed that they are still in an early phase of implementation, and that the major changes will be more visible down the line. Additionally, informants explain that Ireland does not have an explicit way of assessing the Key Skills yet, which has implications for both external and internal evaluations. Without a way of assessing the Key Skills, examinations have not changed much from prior to the reform, because as one informant put it; "the terminal examination is still 90% content based, so has it really changed that much?" (S2T2).

These descriptions of school inspections, parents holding teachers responsible and exam results portray a high form of public accountability, at times tied to Key Skills. The public accountability category 'school inspections' is especially evident within Key Skills, and this category was identified by both schools. Participants from School 2 identified the last two categories, although not always linking this form of public accountability to the Key Skills Framework. However, Chapter 7 will discuss how the move towards skills-based learning may increase public accountability categories such as the Parents and the Leaving Cert.

### **6.3.1 Summary**

The first impression given by all informants was that teachers and schools in Ireland are given great autonomy in relation to Key Skills. They are provided with guidelines through the curriculum, and the rest is up to the local actors. Teachers from School 1 did also complement this with descriptions of autonomy given by the school management. Hence, informants of this study understand their own autonomy with Key Skills as high for the interpretation and enactment (content), however, they have also given descriptions of being held accountable for

the implementation of Key Skills in several ways. The most dominant type was public accountability where three categories were identified; 1) School Inspections, 2) Parents, and 3) Leaving Certification Results. Category 1, school inspections, was identified by informants from both schools. Teachers and principals from both schools believed in school inspections, where Key Skills would be part of the focus, and expressed a necessity for it. However, when faced with an upcoming inspection in School 2, this positivity changed towards nervous impressions. In a way, this can show that school inspections might be perceived as a form of control after all. The other two categories, Parents and Leaving Certification Results, were identified by informants in School 2. These two forms of accountability were experienced as forced, and as limiting to their professional judgement. Lastly, personal and professional accountability was described by informants at both schools. Complementary to the three public accountability categories, informants felt a personal and professional responsibility to enact and implement the Key Skills Framework.

As informants from School 2 described accountability by parents and the Leaving Certificate, it became evident that they saw this type of accountability tied to the old Junior Cycle, and that Key Skills would hopefully be a shift. While these two categories were not identified as necessarily being influenced by the Key Skills Framework, Chapter 7 will discuss how this may perception may change with time. On the one hand all informants believed they had autonomy with Key Skills, but they also portrayed several ways of being held accountable. This triggers an important question; does the movement towards skills-based learning and a post-bureaucracy system mean no autonomy at all? From the data collected one can see that the autonomy described by the informants relates to autonomy within curricula that has learning outcomes. As can be seen from data on teacher autonomy, but also from data in RQ1, the changes towards skills-based learning might mean that teachers are freer in the interpretation and enactment. This autonomy is based on target setting, learning objectives and competition, and down the line this can produce a highly developed form of public accountability. Although some of the informants believe the New Junior Cycle Reform and the Key Skills Framework might be changing some public accountability forms, it is necessary to understand what the Key Skills are based on and what they produce. Key Skills does not necessarily need to choose between autonomy and accountability, according to the informants both are present. The importance lies in how this teacher autonomy is expressed in the National Curriculum and the Key Skills Framework and in what way, and how this might have implications for how teachers perceive it.

## 7 Discussion

This chapter will continue discussion points raised in the findings chapter and relating it to the analytical framework. The first three sections are organized systematically to match discussions related to each research question. The comparative dimensions have been presented thoroughly in the findings section and concluded that the comparison between the two schools was less fruitful in terms of RQ1. Hence, for RQ1 there is a focus on the second comparative aspect here. The differences between the two schools are more prominent for RQ2 and RQ3 and will be included in this discussion, however a more explicit comparison is conducted at the very end of this chapter. The last section comes back to the two ideal types described in Chapter 3.4.5, and links data to the analytical framework of the study to present and conclude on the research questions and overall research purpose.

### 7.1 Interpretation and Enactment Across Subjects – The Reality of Generic Skills

The findings show that interpretations and enactments did not vary much between schools, but rather between and within subjects. This section will therefore not focus on the comparison between schools. The interpretations of Key Skills provided by the informants were many, at times ten different interpretations were present. This, of course, has implications for the enactment. How teachers interpret Key Skills comes to life in their practical use in the classroom (Goodlad et al., 1979; Lundgren, 1979). Consequently, the enactments of Key Skills vary too, depending on how the teachers have interpreted them. This supports Lundgren's third curriculum level, and Goodlad et al.'s perceived and enacted curriculum in that individual perceptions and interpretations influence the enactment, which can also be seen at the two schools that participated.

However, the fact that interpretations and enactments varied between all participants regardless of school or subject discipline is not too interesting in itself. The vast differences of interpretations sheds light on how generic skills may be designed – there is a certain openness to how the Key Skills are articulated. There is an open framing of the Key Skills that allows for it to be interpreted and enacted in several ways. Teachers expressed a high degree of autonomy in the enactment of the Key Skills Framework, and that they were “free to do whatever they want” (S1T4). This supports other research in the field, skills-based curricula allow teachers to

take a step back and interpret, reflect and act (Sivesind, 2013). Chapter 7.4 will come back to this discussion. The case of individual interpretations is not problematic, however the understanding of the terms “generic” and “cross-curricular” skills can drive teachers to misinterpret the Key Skills Framework in that the skills play out similarly in every subject. Similar to what Lundgren (1979) and Goodlad et al. (1979) depicted, this study finds that there is a gap between the intended curriculum and the implemented curriculum. The Key Skills Framework specifies that the skills are cross-curricular in their nature. This study however, shows that the Key Skills are interpreted and enacted differently according to subject discipline.

Interviews and observations urges for a deeper understanding of how subjects are built – on what grounds, traditions and understandings are subjects developed? Although a framework like Key Skills, that is built on a *social effectiveness theory*, does not center around academic subjects, it does favor some subjects over others (Wahlström, 2016). Science for instance, has a long tradition of skills-based learning with research, gathering data, working in teams and analyzing, which only makes it easy for the subject to adapt to the changes of Key Skills (Wahlström, 2016; P21, n.d.). The Key Skills Framework builds on already existing practice in Science. Other subjects, such as Mathematics, will have a harder time in adapting to these changes, as this study shows. Furthermore, English is a subject that might allow more creativity and communication than Mathematics, simply because the subject has it in its’ nature to focus on these areas. Unless one understands that Mathematics is very different to Science or English and that History is very different to PE, it will be difficult to understand that skills and skills-based learning is not necessarily always generic. Like Yates and Young (2010), and Dale et al. (2011) describe, the informants of this study portray that there are challenges with fitting in skills across subjects and it urges for a more holistic understanding of the Key Skills Framework. If one could see the Key Skills Framework according to subjects, or at least within a wheel of subjects, it will show that skills are not always generic (Yates and Young, 2010, Dale et al, 2011). There is a need to reinvent the term “generic” in relation to Key Skills, because as it stands now the framework works far from generic and is contradictory to its meaning.

The Key Skills Framework relates to Wahlström’s (2016) *social effectiveness* term, and Young’s (2008) term of *technical-instrumentalism*. This tradition is however accompanied by other traditions too. Besides the Key Skills Framework, there are subject divisions in the Irish National Curriculum for Junior Cycle. This resembles Wahlström’s (2016) *scientific rationalism* and Young’s (2008) *neo-conservative traditionalism* where knowledge is based on

academic subjects/disciplines. In the practical enactment in the classrooms both traditions were present too, leaving a conclusion that there is a hybrid of these knowledge traditions in the Irish Curriculum for Junior Cycle, and inside the classrooms at the two schools. Social effectiveness and technical-instrumentalism shines through in the schools' integration of the Key Skills Framework. The next two sections will discuss these in more detail.

## **7.2 Why Interdisciplinary Subjects?**

The four interdisciplinary subjects developed by School 2 can be tied to a larger debate of knowledge. Like Wahlström (2016) and Young (2008) argue, interdisciplinarity is common in a social effectiveness knowledge tradition, and is evident also in technical-instrumentalism. Yates and Young (2010) and Boix Mansilla and Duraising (2007) discuss how the shift to a curriculum affected by globalization has to accommodate skills-learning using new traditions of knowledge. In order to effectively implement skills-learning, many urge for a new understanding of subject disciplines and there is a reduced role for school subjects (Yates and Young, 2010). This is where interdisciplinary subjects play an important role; they are often created because complex problem-solving is not accommodated by the traditional subject disciplines (Boix Mansilla and Duraising, 2007).

School 2 developed the four interdisciplinary subjects to succeed in an effective implementation of skills-and thematic-learning in their everyday practice. This serves as an explicit example of how schools choose to downgrade academic subjects in favor of more practical and skills-based learning. If traditional academic subjects fail to integrate a framework like Key Skills, creating new interdisciplinary and thematic subjects may help in the case of accommodating for skills-based learning. As findings show, there are subjects that are less suited to enact the Key Skills Framework, such as Mathematics. A version of the social-effectiveness theory may therefore be that an academic subject as Mathematics becomes unprioritized or is deemed as less valuable compared to interdisciplinary subjects. Traditional academic subjects may be threatened in a knowledge society characterized by effectiveness and post-bureaucracy elements (Winch, 2014). However, in the case of how School 2 have implemented interdisciplinary subjects, they still work alongside academic subjects as supplements. Although data show that there is a great emphasis on the Key Skills' and on learning outcomes in the four interdisciplinary subjects, rather than subject content, there is still evidence of a hybrid between knowledge traditions. We can still talk about a mix of social-effectiveness and scientific rationalism, because rather than

working on the ‘expense of’, interdisciplinary subjects work *alongside* academic subjects in School 2.

### 7.3 The Consequences of Having Monitoring Software in Education

One form of a post-bureaucracy movement is the emergence of big data, or complex technologies in education (Williamson, 2017). While educational measurement is not new, neither is the use of technology in education, both are being extended in scope through the use of big data and analytics processes (Williamson, 2017). With a technological software as VSWare, it is possible for schools to present analytical data and adapt it to their “users” – the students. The VSWare software (and in fact, the digitalized school inspection reports too) are great examples of Williamson’s terms of ‘datafication’ and ‘digitization’ in education (Williamson, 2017). The software transforms an aspect of education, like the assessment of Key Skills, into digital data. This allows it to be measured and in turn be made in to charts and tables. VSWare translates educational practices into software code and produces an e-learning software for schools to use.

Observations and interviews showed that a standard-setting tool for the software had not been developed in School 1. Ravitch (1996) argues that a set of *content standards* and *performance standards* are necessary to obtain coherence within the school and ensure equality. If the goal is to improve achievement through the use of VSWare, it is necessary to have clearly defined expectations. A collective language within School 1 would serve to create coherence for the use of the software-based assessment tool for Key Skills, and in doing so making sure that all students have the same opportunities to do well. Without a set of standards tied to this assessment tool the question of teacher bias becomes important too and how students should be judged on the same grounds. This becomes difficult when content – and performance standards within VSWare are non-existent within the school. Three teachers at School 1 identified issues with deciding how and when to give points, and some wanted a collective language to assess the Key Skills through VSWare. There is a lack of *accuracy standards* and *feasibility standards* within the use of VSWare at School 1 that can create ethical issues (Stufflebeam, 1994).

These reflections beg the question; how can we assess the Key Skills’ as objectively and fair as possible? It also triggers the question of whether the shift towards performance standards is



wanted in schools. The notion of improving student achievement through performance standards fits well in to a post-bureaucracy movement, too. There should be little discussion of whether standards should be developed or not, because they are necessary in order to create coherence within the school and fair treatment of the students. However, once these have been developed I argue we should shift the focus to why some schools have chosen to use this assessment tool and what implications performance standards have. School 1 should assess whether they want to continue to assess the Key Skills through big data, and whether the skills' can be assessed by other means that does not necessarily favor competition and comparison.

This form of assessment creates an individualization of the students where each individual student is in focus rather than a collective focus on a student group. The software can calculate areas the student struggles with, or vice versa areas that the student succeeds in. This has implications for the differentiation of learning, and many informants from School 1 argued that this made it easier to adapt their teaching to every student's needs. This is a positive aspect of the software and few would argue against it. However, it is arguable that the software produces accountability although it is directed towards to the students. The students' behavior is monitored through a technological software, and it is calculated and measured. In some way, students are being held accountable by their teachers through the use of VSWare. Williamson (2017) argues that we need to understand the emergence of big data in relation to other features of education such as policies, accountability mechanisms, commercial and economic interests, scientific knowledge and professional practice. Big data intensifies old practices such as accountability and are being described as 'government at distance' (Williamson, 2017). It is therefore necessary to understand that a software like VSWare is an indirect mechanism that can be used by authorities, transnational companies and other businesses to achieve their objectives; traits that are predominant in a post-bureaucracy (Williamson, 2017; Maroy, 2008).

## **7.4 Autonomy Within an Age of Accountability**

Previously, curricula were designed with a closed framing, more tied to laws and regulations (Sivesind, 2013). Now, the Key Skills Framework and other curricula that is based on social effectiveness, is designed around target setting and performance indicators (Walhström, 2016; Sivesind, 2013; Young, 2008). The participating teachers described having learning objectives tied to Key Skills in nearly all their classes. Learning objectives is a form of target setting, and the way it is articulated allows for a broad understanding of Key Skills. This shows an open

format of content, which can mean that teachers are free to choose a theme or concept to teach, or a skill, within their subject. This relates to Engelstad's (2003) description of 'freedom to act'. A curriculum that is open in action and less open in content can create a predictable framework because local actors are more aware of how they have to work to achieve certain goals (Sivesind, 2013). On the other hand, a curriculum that is open in content, but less open in action gives teachers and schools the responsibility to create own meanings and practices to reach desired results (Sivesind, 2013). The latter version makes for accountability for schools because despite having freedom to interpret and enact, local actors are responsible to meet certain targets and can be perceived as *negative freedom* as described by Engelstad (2003).

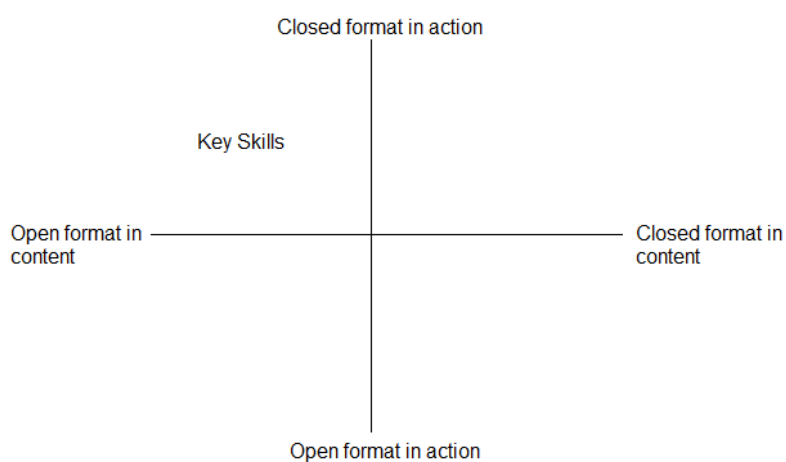


Figure 7: Curriculum format, elaborated by researcher, customized from Sivesind, 2013.

What Key Skills and other frameworks alike show is that they are open in their format of content, but that in action it becomes narrower (Sivesind, 2013). Data from interviews show that there is a low degree of content specification in the Key Skills Framework, and the informants expressed feeling autonomous in their interpretations and enactments. To exemplify: the Key Skills Framework allows for choice; one can choose whichever content to teach – a history session about Vikings or the colonization of America, but there is still a certain restrictiveness to it that shines through in the use of target setting. Together with learning objectives, Key Skills puts targets on the agenda that should be met – these are specifications relating to action. It is here that it becomes clear how the Key Skills Framework is somewhat closed in action.

This resembles the quasi market regulation model where the nation state is responsible for defining educational objectives, and teachers are given autonomy to implement them (Maroy, 2008). It is not surprising that teachers experience the Key Skills Framework as giving them

freedom to teach – it is designed to do so. However, the nature of target setting in education is to construct expectations in terms of objectives, and this is where a post-bureaucratic element is present within Key Skills. Furthermore, two of the public accountability categories identified in the data; School Inspections and Leaving Cert Results shows evidence of an evaluative state (Maroy, 2008). The targets of Key Skills are set by the nation state (the Department of Education and Skills and the NCCA) through the National Curriculum for Junior Cycle, and it delegates responsibility to schools to implement these. An external school performance evaluation (school inspection and/or external Leaving Certificate) is later set up to check whether schools have met their targets, as a sort of contract between the national level and the local level (Maroy, 2008). Whether the schools have fulfilled their contract or not then becomes a subject of accountability.

Because of a relative autonomy with interpretation and enactment of Key Skills described by teachers and principals, elements from Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucrat are also found. Informants described being able to exercise discretionary judgment in their classrooms. The industrial dispute where many schools refused to implement the changes of the New Junior Cycle Reform also exemplifies how teachers and principals work as street-level bureaucrats; if they do not find the reform legitimate they can oppose it (Lipsky, 2010). However, as Maroy (2008), I argue that this autonomy might be threatened by an evaluative state. Having sides of a post-bureaucracy does not necessarily leave out autonomy completely (Maroy, 2008). This is clear from the data too. Having aspects of a post-bureaucracy does however *change* the teacher autonomy. There is a difference in control; previously national control was tied to regulations and laws, now, control is tied to target setting established by national authorities (as seen in Figure 7). This means that control was always there, and still is, but that the control systems have changed. Maroy (2008) argues that a focus on skills and learning outcomes favors control systems based on external evaluations and results, and this has implications for how teachers perceive their own autonomy. According to the data, teacher autonomy is still present, but the autonomy within Key Skills is based on an open format of content rather than on action.

This leaves with the conclusion that the accountability categories described by Sinclair (1995) were found in the data too. Even though participants at School 2 identified the public accountability categories Parents and Leaving Certification Results as not necessarily tied to the Key Skills Framework, it is important to understand that the move towards an evaluative state (where skills-based learning is represented) will only increase public accountability

systems. Parents are given more power in a post-bureaucracy with access to public school reports and free-school choice, and there is an increase of both internal and external evaluations and assessments (Maroy, 2008). This means that even though the Key Skills Framework may not be a subject for Parents or the Leaving Cert Results today, it may well be in the future. Here, data deviates somewhat from the ideas portrayed in the analytical framework of Maroy (2008). However, if researchers were to do this study two-three years down the line (or even five-ten years) when the curriculum changes have been implemented in full, a different picture of the public accountability categories Parents and Leaving Cert Results will most likely be drawn.

Further on, the informants related the Key Skills' to "future needs". They interpreted the importance of having skills-knowledge to demands in the labor market, and in general the reality of a fast-paced future in our knowledge society. Several teachers described imaginary situations that students might face in the future; such as having to change careers twice or more and being able to adapt to these changes. This goes hand in hand with theory within skills-learning; it is designed to target a new mandate based on economic, political and educational matters where schools need to prepare students for their own future, but also a collective future (Young, 2008). These descriptions resemble a society of risk and tries to battle global issues with, among other things, skills-learning.

Nevertheless, frameworks like Key Skills also have an economic and human capital side to it (OECD, 2009; Wahlström, 2016; Young, 2008). The Key Skills Framework resemble both aspects – a focus on economy and the labor market, and creating effective workers (Managing Myself, Managing Information and Thinking, Staying Well), and a focus on creating a society of respect (Working with Others, Communicating). As other research on Irish education policy shows (O'Doherty, 2014), the Key Skills Framework bears elements of New Public Management, human capital and a post-bureaucracy movement that resembles an OECD philosophy. Through learning objectives and target setting, the six Key Skills have been designed to combat complex problems in our society, as well as preparing for a demanding labor market. Lastly, as described by McCruairc and Harford (2008) and Maroy (2008), the informants from the two Irish field work schools made descriptions of organizational models that were traditionally used within the private sector; results, competition, performance management and benchmarking. This again shows evidence of post-bureaucratic elements.

## 7.5 Short Summary and a Hybrid of Ideal Types

In order to establish how the data fits in to the two ideal types presented in Chapter 3.4.5, it is necessary to do a short summary of the previous discussion points. The two participating schools have shown a mix of knowledge traditions, as has been established in the first sections of this discussion. It is also evident that the two schools have described both autonomy and accountability in the use of Key Skills. The autonomy tied to Key Skills resembles an open format in content, or ‘freedom to act’ as described by Engelstad (2003). The accountability systems described by informants from both schools (but in particular informants from school 2), show that although there is a certain amount of ‘freedom to act’ there is still a presence of *negative freedom* (Engelstad, 2003). Informants gave descriptions of how some of the accountability systems are experienced as forced and that they do not necessarily have ‘freedom from coercion’ within the use of Key Skills (Engelstad, 2003).

The data shows that there are elements of the professional-bureaucrat described by Maroy (2008) and the street-level bureaucrat described by Lipsky (2010). Teachers and principals are still able to enact with a certain amount of discretion, and some informants describe professional accountability (Sinclair, 1995). However, the particular description of autonomy resembles that of Maroy (2008) in a post-bureaucracy. The finding is present in both cases although a closer look will provide diversity. What differs between the two schools is how post-bureaucracy elements come to life and which elements that are most present. In School 1 post-bureaucracy elements are clear through the use of VSWare, and descriptions of personal, professional and the public accountability category School Inspections. School 2 has post-bureaucracy elements also through reflections around School Inspections but adds two public accountability categories; Parents and Leaving Certification. Additionally, the school has interdisciplinary subjects that also contributes to the post-bureaucracy movement. The school initiatives that are fully or partly linked to the Key Skills Framework – interdisciplinary subjects and the use of complex technologies – are elements that resemble a post-bureaucracy, the latter identified within target setting, competition and benchmarking and the former as a way of downgrading academic subjects.

At last I argue that both schools have shown traits from both ideal types created through the analytical framework. There is again evidence of a hybrid – neither of the two schools can fit perfectly in to one of the two ideal types. The real world which can be observed empirically

does not work in a black-and-white manner, and it is expected that the comparison between the two field work schools show elements from several theoretical underpinnings. The two field work schools differ in how they relate to post-bureaucracy elements, School 1 showing these through the monitoring software VSWare, and School 2 through interdisciplinary subjects and a higher degree of accountability descriptions. Nevertheless, both School 1 and School 2 are a mix of a post-bureaucracy and a professional-bureaucracy, although I argue that both schools are moving more towards the post-bureaucracy ideal type as they show great initiative towards changes related to the Key Skills Framework.

The comparison between the two local schools has proven to be most fruitful for RQ 2 and RQ 3, while the comparison between subject disciplines proved important for RQ 1. The two local schools that have participated in this study share similar traits, and data collected show that in the question of integrating the Key Skills Framework and perceptions on teacher autonomy related to Key Skills, the two schools showed differences, hence falling under Steiner-Khamisi’s (2013) terms of SS-DO.

Ideal Type	School 1	School 2
<b>Professional-Bureaucrat:</b>		
• Content-Based Learning	X	X
• Autonomy	X	X
• Street-Level Bureaucracy	X	X
<b>Post-Bureaucracy:</b>		
• Skills-Based Learning	X	X
• Accountability	X	X
• Quasi-Market/Evaluative State	X	X
• (Monitoring Software)	X	
• (Interdisciplinary Subjects)		X

Table 8: Hybrid of Ideal Types. Compiled by researcher, based on the ideal types from Figure 4.

## 8 Concluding Remarks and Policy Implications

The overarching purpose of this study has been to examine how local schools and local actors in Ireland implement the Key Skills Framework through perceptions and enactments, and what consequences of implementing this framework may have for the professional autonomy of teachers and principals. Informants from both field work schools displayed similarities in interpretations and classroom enactments. The most prominent findings of the local implementation are therefore tied to subject dependability and challenges with confining an academic subject to generic skills. Especially interesting was challenges with the implementation of certain Key Skills' such as Staying Well and Communicating in Natural Sciences. Furthermore, the school initiatives of technological use to assess the Key Skills Framework, and the development of interdisciplinary subjects to battle challenges with skills-based learning gave a clear picture of possible implementation strategies in the two Irish schools. There was a strong connection between how informants perceived the Key Skills Framework and public accountability systems, as well as professional accountability. Adding all this information together it sheds light on what forms of governance that are dominant at the two field work schools, and how the participant teachers and principals' in Ireland perceive it.

This thesis has studied the implementation of the Key Skills Framework in two Irish Junior Cycle schools, and in doing so a few factors for realization and nonrealization of implementation have been identified. In order for the framework to be implemented in a more efficient way, policy makers, schools, principals and teachers need to address certain issues, such as; the difficulties of 'changing' some academic subjects to fit skills-based learning, how some skills do not necessarily fit in as a 'skill' and should be portrayed differently to keep it as a central focus in Irish education (ref: Staying Well), the issue of standard setting to assess the Key Skills' and the issue of measuring the skills in the first place. Based on these factors that contribute to a less efficient implementation of the Key Skills Framework, few policy recommendations follow below:

- More attention should be put on the character and organization of academic subjects and their challenges with the term "generic" – a reinvention of how we portray cross-curricular and generic skills.

- Staying Well or the sense of Wellbeing has to be included in Irish education in another way than through Key Skills as it is not perceived to be working well now.
- If the Key Skills are to be assessed, be it internally or externally, there needs to be redefined a set of standards (both nationally and in local schools).

The aim of this study was never to generalize for a whole nation as this is a qualitative case study. Yet, certain images have emerged from the data that in turn have created representations from Irish Junior Cycle schools and a few points can be raised as to how the local schools interpreted, perceived and acted out the Key Skills Framework. Since the two schools shared more similarities than differences within the interpretation and enactment, it is likely that the same findings may be found in other cases. One may generalize to these settings (local school settings), but in order to present a more profound and appropriate generalization another research design would be necessary. A mixed method design that is large scale in nature, perhaps using both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews would present a more robust result.

This thesis has examined perceptions and experiences with the Key Skills Framework so far through the eyes of teachers and principals at two Junior Cycle schools in Ireland, hence presenting a bottom-up study. However, it also includes elements of a top-down study, as discussions around bureaucracy movements have been discussed. For further research on the topic it could serve to do a large-scale study across a high count of schools in Ireland, preferably with schools that belong to both teacher unions (and perhaps develop a comparative study between schools of one teacher union as opposed to the other). Lastly, it would be purposeful to examine how students experience the Key Skills Framework and initiatives related to it, such as the software system used to assess the skills to provide a different angle to the topic. It is also my strong belief that Comparative and International Education research should continue to explore modern curricula and the focus on skills-learning, tying it up to global discussions of government, bureaucracy and control systems. The more this is done, the more it is possible for local actors to understand where the emphasis on frameworks as Key Skills stems from and who it serves at the end.



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# 10 Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Interview Guide for Teachers

<p><b><u>Purpose:</u></b> To understand how teachers and principals in Ireland interpret Key Skills in order to get a variety of interpretations and usages. Building on a discussion of Key Skills, the teacher’s role in meeting with Key skills will be discussed, primarily tying it up to new forms of bureaucracy.</p> <p><b><u>Topics:</u></b> Key Skills, competencies, curriculum implementation, bureaucracy, teacher’s role</p> <p><b><u>Ethics:</u></b> Ethical clearance from NSD. Go through purpose, topic and research questions, while referring to the written consent form (every respondent is anonymous).</p>		
Category/RQ	Question	Follow-up
<u>Introduction</u>	To get an easy start, I would like you to tell me about yourself as a teacher at this school, your responsibilities and every-day life here.	Subject(s) and grade(s). Time in current job/position Background
<u>Interpretations</u>  (RQ 1)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Could you briefly explain how you personally understand Key Skills [KS]?</li> <li>2. How are Key Skills important, if at all?</li> <li>3. In your view, in what situations would students make use of KS?</li> <li>4. What is expected of students when it comes to the learning and use of KS? What is expected from teachers?</li> <li>5. KS is a set of generic skills. Do you think they play out similarly in every subject?</li> </ol>	<p>Please give a brief description of each of the six KS</p> <p>With each of the six KS</p> <p>Give examples!</p> <p>Why/Why not?</p>

<p><u>Enactment</u> (RQ 2)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When you plan your lessons, do you plan an explicit incorporation of KS? Why/Why not.</li> <li>2. How do you personally incorporate KS when teaching?</li> <li>3. Are some KS easier to incorporate than others, and if so, why do you think that might be?</li> <li>4. How does one know if the students have learned KS successfully?</li> </ol>	<p>Why?</p> <p>Different activities for different skills?</p> <p>Any KS you use more? Why?</p> <p>How do you assess them?</p>
<p><u>The role of the teacher with KS</u> (RQ 3)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Where do you reckon the emphasis on KS in education stems from?</li> <li>2. Who is responsible for the implementation of KS in Ireland?</li> <li>3. How does the Ministry of Education/the NCCA work alongside schools for the implementation of KS?</li> <li>4. How do you understand your own role in the implementation of KS?</li> <li>5. How do you perceive the amount of latitude teachers are given for the enactment and implementation of KS?</li> <li>6. Are there any stakes (incentives and/or sanctions) from local or national authorities if you do not meet their expectations with KS? If so, how do you perceive these?</li> <li>7. Why do you think KS has become prominent in Ireland? (and worldwide)</li> </ol>	<p>Politics, policy, practice</p> <p>Can you personally contribute to the implementation?</p> <p>Has the teacher role changed?</p> <p>Competition?</p> <p>External and internal evaluation?</p> <p>Inspection?</p> <p>National testing?</p> <p>Accountable?</p>

<p><u>Closing questions</u></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Have you had any challenges with the use of KS in the classroom? What kind of challenges?</li><li>2. Are there any other skills and competencies you would like to add to KS, if you had the chance?</li></ol>	<p>How did you solve them?</p> <p>Which ones?</p> <p>Why these?</p>
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## Appendix 2 – Interview Guide for Principals

<p><b>Purpose:</b> To understand how teachers and principals in Ireland interpret Key Skills in order to get a variety of interpretations and usages. Building on a discussion of Key Skills, the teacher's role in meeting with Key skills will be discussed, primarily tying it up to new forms of bureaucracy.</p> <p><b>Topics:</b> Key Skills, competencies, curriculum implementation, bureaucracy, teacher's role</p> <p><b>Ethics:</b> Ethical clearance from NSD. Go through purpose, topic and research questions, while referring to the written consent form (every respondent is anonymous).</p>		
Category/RQ	Question	Follow-up
<u>Introduction</u>	To get an easy start, I would like you to tell me about yourself as a teacher at this school, your responsibilities and every-day life here.	Subject(s) and grade(s). Time in current job/position Background
<u>Interpretations</u> (RQ 1)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Could you briefly explain how you personally understand Key Skills [KS]?</li> <li>2. How are Key Skills important, if at all?</li> <li>3. In your view, in what situations would students make use of KS?</li> <li>4. What is expected of students when it comes to the learning and use of KS? What is expected from teachers?</li> <li>5. KS is a set of generic skills. Do you think they play out similarly in every subject?</li> </ol>	<p>Please give a brief description of each of the six KS</p> <p>With each of the six KS</p> <p>Give examples!</p> <p>Why/Why not?</p>

<p><u>Institutional conditions and adaptations</u></p> <p>(RQ 2)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Has KS been adopted at your school?</li> <li>2. Can you tell me about the process of implementing KS in the daily practice in your school?</li> <li>3. Who took part in the implementation process of KS at your school?</li> <li>4. What needs to be in place in order to establish KS as a key-element in planning activities?</li> <li>5. How does KS fit in to the established routines and guidelines used by the staff within your school?</li> </ol>	<p>How?</p> <p>Why did these take part?</p> <p>Resources? People? Expertise?</p>
<p><u>The role of the teacher with KS</u></p> <p>(RQ 3)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Where do you reckon the emphasis on KS in education stems from?</li> <li>2. Who is responsible for the implementation of KS in Ireland?</li> <li>3. How does the Ministry of Education/the NCCA work alongside schools for the implementation of KS?</li> <li>4. How do you understand your own role in the implementation of KS?</li> <li>5. How do you perceive the amount of latitude teachers are given for the enactment and implementation of KS? What about principals?</li> <li>6. Are there any stakes (incentives and/or sanctions) from local or national authorities if you do not meet their expectations? If so, how do you perceive these?</li> </ol>	<p>Politics, policy, practice</p> <p>Can you personally contribute to the implementation of KS?</p> <p>Has the teacher role changed?</p> <p>Competition?</p> <p>External and internal evaluation?</p> <p>Inspection?</p> <p>National testing?</p> <p>Accountable?</p>

	7. Why do you think KS has become prominent in Ireland? (and worldwide)	
<u>Closing questions</u>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have you had any challenges with the adoption of KS? What kind of challenges?</li> <li>2. Are there any other skills and competencies you would like to add to KS, if you had the chance?</li> </ol>	<p>How did you solve them?</p> <p>Which ones?</p> <p>Why these?</p>

## **Appendix 3 – Observation Guide**

### **Before observation:**

**Date:**

**Start-time for observation:**

**Ending-time for observation:**

**Place for observation (school – code name):**

**Participant teacher in observation (code name):**

**Subject:**

**Grade:**

### **Description/topic of observation:**

How do teachers and principals interpret and enact Key Skills within and across two lower secondary schools in Ireland? (RQ1)

How are Key Skills integrated within teaching at two lower secondary schools in Ireland? (RQ2)

**During observation:**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Observation points</b>
<b>Categories of Key Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Which of the Key Skills are represented in the lesson?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Managing Myself</li><li>- Staying Well</li><li>- Communicating</li><li>- Being Creative</li><li>- Working with Others</li><li>- Managing Information and Thinking</li></ul></li><li>• Are they enacted by the teacher with explicit reference to the Key Skills framework or not?</li></ul>
<b>Didactics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Through what didactical methods are Key Skills enacted?</li> <li>• Describe the activity(ies):</li></ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What resources are used in the enactment of KS, and how?</li> <li>• Are any of the resources made by the teacher himself/herself?</li></ul>



<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are there any specific situations where challenges linked to KS activities occur?</li><li>• Describe the situation:</li> <li>• What does the teacher do in this (these) situation(s)?</li></ul>
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**Immediately after observation:**

Immediate thoughts/impressions:

Immediate interpretation of observations:

## Appendix 4 – Consent Form for Participation

# Request for participation in the research project

## The Implementation of Key Skills

### Background and Purpose

This research is part of a dissertation for the master program Comparative and International Education at the University of Oslo (Norway). Based on the global interest of skills and competencies, this research aims to research these within the Irish context, through the implementation of Key Skills in Junior Cycle. I wish to research different interpretations, enactments and how schools have integrated Key Skills in their daily practice. Further, I wish to shed light on the changes in accountability in meeting with the Key Skills Framework. The purpose of the thesis is as follows: *to examine how the Key Skills Framework from the New Junior Cycle Curriculum is implemented in local Irish schools, and to explore the implications this framework has for the professional autonomy of local actors.*

### Research questions:

1. How do teachers and principals interpret and enact Key Skills within and across two lower secondary schools in Ireland?
2. How are Key Skills integrated within teaching at two lower secondary schools in Ireland?
3. How do teachers at two lower secondary schools in Ireland understand their autonomy in regard to Key Skills?

Two lower secondary schools in Dublin will be participating in the study. The principal from each school will be asked to be a respondent for this research, but also four teachers from each school. The participant teachers should represent a wide range of subjects, both from natural – and social science.

You have been asked to join this study because you meet the set criteria. Please read below for practical information.

## **Participation in the study**

If your school wishes to participate and contribute to the study, there will be held interviews and observations. All participants will be asked to sit for an in-depth interview that will last around 30 minutes. The interviews will be recorded with a voice-recorder and later transcribed. The questions in the interviews will evolve around a discussion of Key Skills and the practical use/implementation of these skills. The observations will entitle me as a researcher engaging to a certain degree in activities, hence there will be participant observation. Notes will be taken during observation. Observations will be done before the interviews.

## **What happens with the data/information about you?**

All data will be handled with confidentiality. The data will be handled only by the researcher and the supervisor of this project. A scrambling key will be kept. The respondents will not be directly identified in the final product (the thesis), but there will be background information. For example type of subject and grade he/she teaches in. The name of the two schools will not be identified.

The research is planned to end in June 2018. The data (recordings and field notes) will after this be deleted.

## **Voluntarily**

It is optional to participate in this study, and you can at any time withdraw your consent without reason. If you withdraw, all information/data about you will be anonymized.

If you wish to participate or have questions regarding the study, please contact (student) Ida Martínez Lunde, [idadclunde@hotmail.com](mailto:idadclunde@hotmail.com), +4795859984 or (supervisor) Kirsten Sivesind, [kirsten.sivesind@iped.uio.no](mailto:kirsten.sivesind@iped.uio.no)

The Study has been reported and approved by the NSD – Norwegian Center for Research Data AS.

## **Consent to participation of the study**

I have received information about the study and I consent to participation

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(Signed by respondent, date)