Broke, not broken: Exploring the narrated experiences of teachers from low-income backgrounds

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education.

Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

Signature: ______________________________

Date: 14th October 2023

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List of Abbreviations

APT	Access to Post-primary Teaching Project
CAO	Central Applications Office
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CRQ	Central Research Question
DARE	Disability Access Route
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DITE	Diversity of Initial Teacher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEAR	Higher Education Access Route
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
PAC	Postgraduates Applications Centre
PATH	Programme for Access to Higher Education
PME	Professional Master of Education
SEG	Socio-Economic Group

Abstract

This research is situated in the context of diversity of the teaching profession with respect to socio-economic status. It focuses on the dimension of representation and considers the role modelling potential of post-primary teachers from low-income socio-economic groups (SEGs) in Ireland. Phrases such as *seeing is believing* and *you can't be what you can't see* are synonymous with the potential of role models from similar ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds. However, *seeing* in relation to low-income SEGs is problematic as it relies on disclosure by the teacher and the student. Using the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method, this study draws on the experiences of six post-primary teachers who work in designated disadvantaged schools. This research explores the participants' journeys in becoming teachers, self-disclosure of their SEG background, and their role modelling experiences.

The participants reported the following with respect to becoming: education was highly valued within their family homes, they were altruistically motivated to become teachers, and they received support from their former school principals. Challenges associated with becoming included financial constraints and feelings of isolation and not belonging. The participants used purposeful self-disclosure to support and connect with their students, for pedagogical purposes, and to develop the relational aspects of teaching. Tensions and dilemmas emerged between the participants' social justice motivations of becoming teachers and their perceptions of being a role model. This research suggests an alternative construct of representational advocacy which depicts the manner in which teachers from low-income SEGs leverage their community cultural wealth to advocate for students from demographically congruent backgrounds.

Key words: Teacher diversity, social class, self-disclosure, representational advocacy, role model, community cultural wealth

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This research explores the narrated experiences of post-primary teachers from low-income socio-economic groups (SEGs) in Ireland. This study considers their journeys in becoming teachers, issues relating to self-disclosure, the people who were their role models, and their role modelling experiences with students from similar backgrounds to themselves.

This chapter begins with an overview of the teaching profession with respect to issues relating to diversification. I then state the significance of the study before moving to articulate the research questions which guided the study. I then provide an auto-biographical account to shed light on my motivations behind this research, this section also incorporates my own positionality and reflexivity. Next, I present an overview of the theoretical framework in which the research is situated. Finally, I outline the contents of the remaining chapters in this thesis.

1.2 Research background and context

This research is situated in the broader context of diversity in the teaching profession. This section provides an outline of the current issues with respect to diversification of the teaching profession in order to provide a backdrop to this study.

1.2.1 Rationale for diversification of the teaching profession

The demography of the teaching profession in Ireland is not representative of the student population in relation to socio-economic background (Kileavy 1993; Clarke

2009; Keane and Heinz 2015; Heinz and Keane 2018). This mirrors international trends of the dominance of middle-class individuals in the teaching profession (Schleicher 2014). Arguments for improved representation centre on societal values, equity, provision of role models, and a response to teacher shortages (Menter et al. 2006). Childs et al. (2011) support the view that teachers from low-income SEGs have the potential to act as positive role models by providing equity *in* and *through* access of opportunity. Equity through access in this context, refers to the way in which a student from a low-income SEG might be positively influenced by having a role model from a similar background.

In the foreword for the National Access Plan (Higher Education Authority 2015), the Minister for Education and the Chair of the Higher Education Institution (HEI) claims that the plan would address issues of equity in society and also yield economic benefits. Investing in equitable education systems also has the potential to benefit society from an economic perspective. Schleicher (2014) points out that the cost of increased educational attainment is greatly outweighed by the future economic contribution of the individual. Increased educational attainment is also linked to leading healthier lifestyles and to a decrease in illegal activities and social problems. Policy interest in Ireland has shifted from a narrow economic perspective towards the wider realm of social integration in order to address the complexity and diversity of society and school populations (Heinz and Keane 2018). The school-going population in Ireland represents an increasingly diverse society. The last decade has seen an increase in the number students from different ethnic and cultural

backgrounds and a growth in the number of students with disabilities and special needs in mainstream schools (Teaching Council 2011).

1.2.2 Measures to promote access to ITE in Ireland

Entry into post-primary teaching, in Ireland, is primarily through programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) offered by third level institutions and approved by the Teaching Council. The two main types of ITE programmes are undergraduate (concurrent) programmes, through the Central Application Office (CAO), or post-graduate (consecutive) programmes, through the Postgraduate Application Centre or CAO. Demand for places in concurrent undergraduate programmes can drive the entry requirements beyond academic reach of many applicants, as supply does not meet demand (Darmody and Smyth 2018). In consecutive programmes, diversity is improved due to applications from mature students and those that progress from Further Education programmes. However, some course requirements, for example higher level mathematics, may preclude entrants from designated disadvantaged (DEIS[1]) schools and mature students as higher-level options at Leaving Certificate level may not have been available. Similarly, the Irish language requirement was identified as a barrier to entrants from non-Irish backgrounds (Darmody and Smyth 2016). Diversity in entry to ITE is also impacted by the broader trends in entry to third level institutions.

[1] Delivering Equality of Opportunity in School (DEIS) programme was established in 2005 to support students at risk of educational disadvantage (Department of Education, 2022)

The National Access Plan, in conjunction with previous policies, has addressed some of the challenges faced by students from low-income SEGs and students with disabilities. Additional pathways to enter third level have been created through the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE). These access programmes support entry through the CAO system and provide additional support to the student while they attend higher education programmes. Funding initiatives are also available through the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH), this dedicated fund is committed to increasing participation by under-represented groups in higher education.

Entry into teacher education programmes is only one step in the journey towards a more diverse profession. Barriers which impede progress of applicants from under-represented groups must also be identified and supports provided during each of the following stages: pre-entry point, where teaching is viewed as a viable career option; successful entry into teacher education programmes; during the programme; completion of a programme and progression into employment; and finally, retention to teaching (Heinz and Keane 2018). Further research is warranted in these areas.

1.2.3 Representation and socio-economic status

Throughout the literature, terminology such as *disadvantaged*, *working-class*, *marginalised* and/or *under-represented* is used to identify individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds. As articulated by Ní Chorcora, Bray, and Banks (2023), this language implies that the individuals and their families are at fault in determining student pathways, as opposed to the broader ramifications of societal and systemic structures in which the individuals are situated. For this research, the term low-

income socio-economic group (SEG) is used to represent the target group, however, all related vocabulary was included in reviewing relevant literature.

The primary source of Irish research on diversity in the teaching profession stems from the Diversity of Initial Teacher Education project (DITE), a longitudinal study that commenced in 2013 and examines trends in the socio-economic backgrounds, career motivations, and experiences of entrants into ITE (Keane and Heinz 2015; Heinz 2015; Keane 2017; Keane, Heinz, and Lynch 2018). Emerging from this research and comparable research in the UK and internationally, is that teachers from low-income SEGs indicate challenges associated with belonging and identity. While there is a growing body of research on entrants to teacher education programmes, there is a dearth of research in the Irish context pertaining to the experiences of practising teachers from low-income SEGs (O'Sullivan, Burns, and Bird 2019). Teachers from low-income SEGs occupy a distinctive social space as they traverse class boundaries and enter into a predominantly middle-class profession.

Teachers from low-income SEGs are under-represented within the teaching profession and therefore considered to have less capital (Bourdieu 1986) than their dominant middle-class counterparts. Maguire (2005b) reports that the imbalance in capital can lead to identity issues which manifest in two ways. Firstly, class matching behaviours may occur, whereby teachers from disadvantaged SEGs distance themselves from their working-class identities in order to assimilate into the profession. Secondly, teachers retain their working-class identity, but have feelings of isolation and a sense of not belonging. This raises questions in relation to how teachers from low-income SEGs model. In particular, do class matching behaviours

and or feelings of not belonging influence the potential for role modelling by teachers from low-income SEGs?

Furthermore, phrases such as *seeing is believing* and *you can't be what you can't see* are synonymous with the potential of role models from similar ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds. However, *seeing* in relation to low-income SEGs is problematic as it relies on disclosure by the teacher and the student. This raises additional concerns for the potential of role modelling opportunities due to a lack of disclosure or ability to connect.

Exploration of these influences could lead to a more informed understanding of modelling. However, caution is advised if the onus on being a positive role model is placed solely on specific groups and not the profession as a whole, because this could lead to diversity tokenism or burnout (Santoro 2015). Therefore, identification of the factors which influence positive role modelling opportunities could lead to the provision of improved whole-school supports for students and teachers from low-income SEGs.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study serves to address a gap in the research by focusing on a small dimension in the broad and multifaceted context of diversity of the teaching profession, namely representation with respect to socio-economic background. The experiences of Irish post-primary teachers from low-income SEGs in relation to role modelling are unreported in existing research. This research contributes to the field by exploring

the lived experiences of teachers from low-income backgrounds using the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method.

1.4 Research questions

The purpose of this research was to draw on the narrated experiences of post primary teachers from low-income SEGs in Ireland to better understand the practices and experiences of role modelling. Following a review of literature in the area, the central research question was developed:

Central Research Question:

What do the life stories of post primary teachers from low-income socio-economic groups tell us about the role modelling potential of this under-represented group in the teaching profession in Ireland?

The central research question was further divided into four subsidiary questions as follows:

Sub question 1:

What are the lived experiences of teachers from low-income *SEGs in relation to becoming a teacher?*

This research question aims to identify some of the factors which influenced the participants' decisions to consider teaching as a career. This question will attempt to provide insights into how the concepts of capital, habitus, and community cultural wealth influence the decision-making process.

Sub question 2:

What kind of lived experiences do teachers from low-income SEGs have in relation to disclosing their backgrounds?

The aim of this question is to interrogate whether the participants disclose their background to their students and to consider their motivations for doing so.

Sub question 3:

What do participants' narratives reveal about their experiences of role models and role modelling behaviour?

This question endeavours to investigate the participants' own role models on their path to becoming a teacher. As role aspirants, what character traits, skills, and knowledge did they identify as desirable and worthy of emulation.

Sub question 4:

What, if any, are the lived experiences of teachers from low-income SEGs in relation to being a role model for students in DEIS schools?

The final question will identify and explore the range of role modelling strategies implemented by the participants. This question aims to provide insights into the differing modelling approaches implemented by teachers from low-income SEGs. This question also aims to address if the disclosure of socio-economic status is relevant in order to make connections with students from similar backgrounds.

1.5 Researcher positionality and reflexivity

This research is not about me, however, my own lived experiences are a central motivating factor for choosing the research topic and the manner in which it was conducted. My social class background has given me a nuanced understanding of the multi-faceted challenges faced by others from similar backgrounds, my unique perspective has shaped and informed how this research was designed, implemented, and interpreted. In this section, I share my auto-biographical journey in order to explicitly present my positionality and reflexivity in relation to the study.

I grew up in a council estate in Waterford City, the second eldest of four children. Typical of the era (1950's/60's) neither of my parents completed the Leaving Certificate. They both joined the workforce in their mid-teens to contribute financially to their respective families. My parents held strong values towards education in our household as we grew up, my mother, in particular, always wanted her four daughters to have the opportunities she never had for herself. My eldest sister attended Waterford Regional Technical College[2] (WRTC), now known as South East Technological University (SETU), which was walking distance from our house. My two younger sisters also attended 'the Regional', then known as Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). I wanted to be a Physical Education and Mathematics teacher, which was not possible locally, my dream was to attend the University of Limerick

[2] Waterford Regional Technical College (WRTC) was founded in 1970, known locally as the Regional. It became an Institute of Technology (WIT) in 1997 and in 2022 it was succeeded by the South East Technological University (SETU).

(UL), which necessitated a move away from home and the navigation of systems that were alien to our family.

I enjoyed my time in UL, even though I did not always feel like I fit in, I made some great friends. My experience of post-primary school was that some people were quick to make judgements when they learned of my working-class background. This was not a major cause of concern in secondary school because the school had a high proportion of students from housing estates similar to mine. It was a vastly different demographic in third level, and I quickly realised I was outnumbered. Almost immediately I was acutely aware of my lack of 'capital'. While my family scrimped and saved to ensure I had everything on the required materials list, I subsequently discovered that many of my classmates were very blasé about the items on the list. They possessed a self-assurance and almost arrogance due to their systemic and cultural knowledge. Financially it was difficult, I still vividly remember queuing in the main building on campus to see if the local authority grant had arrived and the sickening feeling when it was late. The first time in the queue, I remember hoping nobody would notice me; however, that eventually changed. There was a sense of solidarity as we collectively appreciated getting the grant, but we were simultaneously tormented by the flaws in the system.

Following my graduation, my first teaching position was in an all-girls secondary school in Kildare, a school with the same patronage as the one I had attended. During my job search that summer, a family member questioned if my job prospects might be better if I did not use my home address, reminding me that people from council estates do not generally become teachers. I was fortunate to have that teaching job

for four years while a teacher was on career break. Since then, I have worked in two co-educational schools which have DEIS status, the first for fifteen years and the second (my current school) for five years. The choice to work in DEIS schools, to work with students from a similar background to my own, is a deliberate one.

I did not disclose my background to my students or work colleagues for approximately the first ten years of my teaching career. Personally, I believed that in order to assimilate into the profession and be accepted by my middle-class peers, I should adopt class matching behaviours. Similarly, I did not have a known encounter with a teacher from a 'disadvantaged' background either. No doubt there were others. Were we all trying to maintain the status quo? Over time, I questioned whether the disclosure of my background to my students would be of benefit. Would it have made a difference to a student if they heard that one of their teachers had come from a similar background? Would it be beneficial if they knew that their teachers truly understood and shared a deep sense of empathy with the challenges they faced?

My original research intention was to focus on the journey of becoming for teachers like me from low-income socio-economic backgrounds. Over the course of the first two years on the doctoral programme, influenced by research in the Irish context, my focus shifted somewhat and became directed towards the role modelling experiences of teachers from low-income SEGs. Research on diversity in the teaching profession points to the potential influence of students being able to identify with their teachers. This is potentially problematic as social class status is not clearly visible and hence the motivation for this study.

My positioning allows me to engage with this research topic in a meaningful way. I have epistemic privilege (Mannay 2015) due to the parallels between my own life trajectory and those of the participants in this research. As an insider, there is shared knowledge, understanding, identity, and experience. I am cognisant that my lived experiences may provide valuable insights and also influence my perceptions and interpretations. However, our stories, our narratives are not the same. I have made deliberate conscious efforts to ensure my own inherent assumptions do not overshadow the voices of the participants who undertook this research journey with me. Throughout this research, I committed to reflexivity by engaging in ongoing critical self-reflection. I cannot renounce the prior knowledge that I possess, but I sought to be reflexive and self-aware by implementing the following measures: engaging in introspection to examine my pre-conceived assumptions and preconceptions, documenting my thoughts, feelings, and insights in a reflexive journal, inviting the participants to examine and reflect on my interpretations, seeking other perspectives through reading literature, reflecting on ethical considerations, and seeking feedback and constructive criticism from peers and mentors to help identify potential blind spots. Implementing a reflexive approach should reduce bias and partisanship (Rowe 2014), however as a novice researcher, complete objectivity may not be plausible (Holmes 2020).

By acknowledging my own positionality, I aim to challenge power dynamics that are often associated with research on marginalised groups. The narratives of the participants and their lived experiences are central to this research. Teaching is inherently a relational profession which relies on multiple forms of communication

including verbal, gestures, body language, and facial expressions. Storytelling is naturally encompassed in the lives of teachers. As humans, "we think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story" (Atkinson 2012, 115). A narrative approach was chosen for this study to place the stories of the individual participants at the forefront, to allow their voices to be heard, recognised, and valued. Narrative research provides a platform to capture the lived experiences of teachers from low-income SEGs by allowing them to share their personal stories, opinions, and perspectives. Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method was chosen as a methodological approach for the interviews because as it places the control over what and when to share in the hands of the participants. This process is explained in detail in chapter three. An emic stance (Morris et al. 1999) was taken in this research by building rapport and trust with the participants and actively listening to their life stories. Transcripts were recorded verbatim and included colloquial language, repeated words, and mis-starts, so the true voices of the participants are presented.

1.6. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The conceptual and theoretical framework adapted for this research was influenced by several theorists over the duration of this study. Initially the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu and Richardson 1986) resonated with me and my own experiences. The concepts of habitus, capital, and class permeate through much of the research on socio-economic disadvantage in education, for example Reay (1997, 2004), Jones (2019), Maguire (2005a, 2005b), Van Galen (2008, 2010), Keane (2011), Keane, Heinz and Lynch (2020). As I delved deeper into the analytical phase of the research, I aligned my thinking with Yosso's (2005)

concept of community cultural wealth. In my opinion, her depiction of the six forms of capital were more adept at describing and understanding the experiences of the participants. Whilst Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital are applicable to this research, they do not do justice in describing and understanding the participants' experiences and motivations. I expanded the realm of capital by utilising Yosso's (2005) alternative construct of community cultural wealth to derive further clarity as to how teachers from low-income SEGs navigate the system and enact their capacity to positively support students from similar backgrounds to themselves. Yosso's depiction of community cultural wealth is situated in critical race theory and draws on the knowledge of Students of Colour. Without diminishing or disrespecting the educational experiences of Students of Colour, I suggest that community cultural wealth is applicable to this research as it explores the social class implications of educational attainment. Community cultural wealth has been used in a similar capacity to this research by Hope and Quinlan (2021) in their research on widening participation for mature working-class students who were predominantly white. Whereas Bourdieu's theories provide a framework for understanding how social inequity and power are reproduced in society, Yosso's model of community cultural wealth moves away from deficit-thinking and provides a strength-based approach to consider the valuable assets, capabilities, and positive traits of the participants.

The role modelling framework applied in this research (Morgenroth, Ryan, and Peters 2015) is rooted in Bandura's (1977) work on social cognition and self-efficacy. In the context of this research, the premise is that individuals learn by observation and imitation, therefore students from low-income backgrounds may benefit from having

teachers from similar backgrounds who have shared experiences and can serve as positive role models. This framework will be further elaborated on in the next chapter.

From a conceptual perspective, the following key elements have also been considered: issues relating to becoming a teacher, and matters arising from and concerning disclosure of one's socio-economic background. The relevant literature related to these elements is presented in chapter two. Figure 1.1 provides an overview of the overall framework which guides this study.

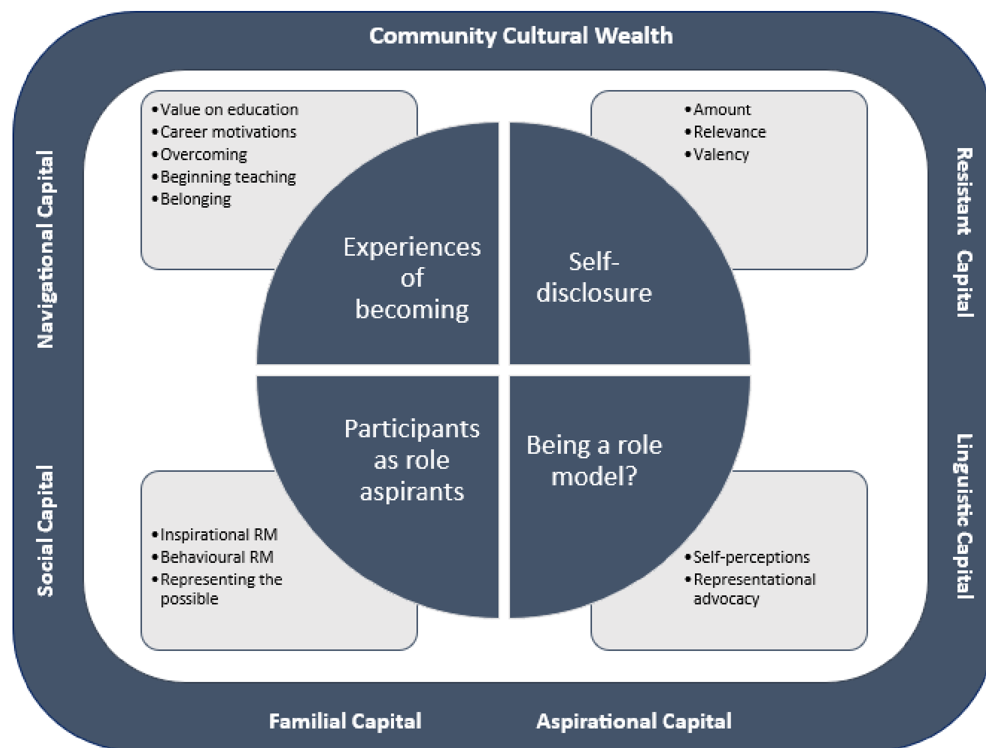

Figure 1.1 Research Framework

The four themes of: experiences of becoming, self-disclosure, participants as role aspirants, and being a role model, along with their corresponding sub-themes are the

focal points of this research. These themes are explored and discussed through the lens of community cultural wealth as appropriate.

1.7 Chapter overview

This chapter has explained the research purpose, by describing the research context and significance of the study. It also provided background information on myself as the researcher and the theoretical perspectives which have guided this study. The four dominant themes: experiences of becoming, self-disclosure, being a role aspirant, and perceptions of being a role model, permeate through this research and provide structure for chapters two, five and six. Chapter two will further elaborate on the theoretical framework by providing a synthesis of relevant literature in the field relating to the aforementioned themes.

Chapter three describes the research design and methodology which aims to place the participants at the centre of the research. The approach to sampling is explained along with a detailed account of how BNIM was implemented and how the subsequent narratives were analysed. This chapter also considers my ethical commitments to the research.

Chapters four and five present my interpretations of the research. Chapter four presents the individual life stories of the participants in the research. Meabh's vignette describes her feelings of being an underdog and being motivated to be a teacher to help students like herself. Neasa's vignette depicts her desire of always wanting to be a teacher and the challenges she faced crossing social class boundaries. In her vignette, Aoife describes the challenges faced by being the first generation in

her family to navigate the CAO system and entry into higher education. Conor's vignette highlights the strong family values placed on education and his desire to want to positively influence peoples' lives. Niamh's vignette presents her story of being the second youngest of ten children and the first of which to complete the Leaving Certificate. Finally, Gráinne's vignette depicts the setbacks she encountered in pursuing her lifelong ambition of becoming a teacher. The second interpretations chapter, chapter five, describes the experiences of the participants in relation to their collective trajectories and establishes similarities between their life stories. Informed by relevant literature, chapter five also situates the experiences of the participants in relation to the themes of becoming, disclosure, and the dual aspects of role modelling. The concept of a representational advocacy is presented in lieu of the construct of role modelling to better frame the participants interactions with their students. Being a representational advocate is considered as it highlights the significance of the participants' community cultural wealth.

Chapter six extends the discussion of the participants' experiences by exploring the tensions and dilemmas associated with role modelling from the participants' perspectives and presents a rationale for consideration of representational advocacy as an alternative frame. This chapter also discusses this research's contributions to knowledge with respect to representation within the teaching profession and the methodological commitments of this study. The chapter concludes by identifying the limitations to the study and suggesting further recommendations for research.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I established the context of this study which aims to investigate what the life stories of post-primary teachers from low-income SEGs tell us about their role modelling potential with students from demographically similar backgrounds. The primary purpose of this chapter is to contextualise their lived experiences through reviewing relevant literature with respect to the three core themes of this study a) becoming, b) self-disclosure, and c) role modelling.

Section 2.2 examines the research on the experiences of becoming a teacher for entrants into the profession from low-income SEGs. Section 2.2.1, shows that career motivations for this cohort are predominantly altruistic, with an ardent desire to want to help students like themselves. The focus then turns to presenting the challenges faced by teachers from low-income groups in relation to navigating the system. Section 2.2.2 considers that navigating the system is challenging due to deficit thinking and distancing behaviour. In section 2.2.3, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and class are used to further explore the concept of belonging and the renegotiation of identity due to social mobility. Section 2.2.4 moves away from deficit thinking approaches and presents relevant literature on Yosso's concept of community cultural wealth as an alternative lens to frame experiences of people from low-income communities.

Section 2.3 considers the concept of self-disclosure. Shared group matching in relation to socio-economic background is not as identifiable as with other minority

groupings, and may rely on self-disclosure by the teacher. This section begins by using the work of Jourard (1971) and Goldstein and Benassi (1994) to define self-disclosure for the purposes of this research. The purposes of self-disclosure, and the impact of self-disclosure within the classroom are presented in sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 respectively. Both of these sections draw on research relating to self-disclosure with respect to sexual orientation, disabilities, and political issues, because research relating to socio-economic background is minimal. The closing section, 2.3.4, presents the findings that student teachers from working class backgrounds share their classed self to be seen as relatable and inclusive teachers.

In section 2.4, I present the literature on role modelling. 2.4.1 begins by conceptualising a definition of role modelling using Morgenroth et al.'s (2015) framework which identifies three perceptions of role models: goal embodiment, attainability, and desirability. Central to role modelling processes is the issue of representation, hence the lack of diversity in the teaching profession is commented on in section 2.4.2. The research on shared group matching, that is the demographic congruence between a teacher and a student grounded on having a shared attribute (for example race, gender or ethnicity), and the effects of having 'a teacher like me' are subsequently discussed in section 2.4.3.

2.2 Becoming

The theme of becoming encapsulates the myriad of factors which influence a person's decision to become a teacher. For the purposes of this research, this chapter

will consider the aspects most pertinent to the context, namely: career motivations, navigating the system, and belonging.

2.2.1 Career motivations of teachers from low-income socio-economic groups

In general, three dominant classifications of career motivations of teachers in the Irish context have been identified: intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic (Drudy et al. 2005; Clarke 2009; Heinz 2013, 2015; Hennessy and Lynch 2017). Intrinsic motivations refer to enjoyment of teaching, job satisfaction, and interest in teaching a particular subject area. Altruistic reasons encompass wanting to contribute to, or enhance, society, wanting to work with children or adolescents, and reasons pertaining to social justice. Extrinsic motivations include status of the profession, pay, holidays, and job security. Heinz (2015) attests that international variation in career motivation is influenced by the differing educational systems, the status of the profession, and cultural influences of each country.

Data collection on social class is not collected as part of third level entry requirements into initial teacher education and is therefore a limiting factor in the collation and analysis of data in the available literature. The range of methods employed across the research to provide an indicator of socio-economic background included: entrance into specific programmes, self-declaration by the student, maintenance grant recipients, employment status of parents/guardians, and comparison of parent(s)/guardian(s) occupations with figures from the central statistics office.

Teachers from low-income SEGs indicate a predominance of altruistic motivations to becoming teachers. Negative experiences at school ignited strong social justice

orientated motivations to become a teacher, therefore enabling them to help, inspire, and support students like themselves (Keane, Heinz, and Lynch 2018). Additionally, interest in the subject area, intrinsic career value, perceived ability, and a desire to shape the futures of children and adolescents, and contributing to society were identified (Heinz, Keane, and Foley 2017). Altruistic motivations of making a difference, the desire to be a role model, upward mobility, and wanting to give something back were also demonstrated (Burns 2018).

These findings concur with Clarke's (2009) earlier research which explored patterns of entry and perceptions of teaching of school leavers and student teachers in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland between 1997 and 2001. The most common reasons identified for choosing teaching as a career were: job satisfaction (97%), interest in working with young people (96%), love of the subject area (95%), and making a worthwhile contribution to society (90%). Clarke's research also indicated that the highest level of agreement with the reason 'working with young people' came from those whose fathers were social welfare recipients or farmers. She does advise caution interpreting the comparative statistics as less than 40% of respondents answered the question on parental income.

2.2.2 Navigating the system

Research indicates that teachers from low-income socio-economic contexts can face significant barriers in relation to educational access and attainment on their journey to becoming a teacher. The consecutive nature of the Professional Master of Education (PME) means that applicants may not be eligible for financial support through grants (Moran 2008). A recent report by the Union of Students in Ireland

(2018) stated that 66% of student teachers rely on their parents for their main source of financial support, 34% accessed the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) grant, 14% relied on loans from financial institutions and 6% received support from a Student Assistance Fund (SAF). Students who may not be able to rely on parents for financial support or whose family income does not meet the threshold for the SUSI grant are often in the precarious position of having to work part-time while meeting their academic obligations. A decrease in applicants to ITE from low-income SEGs was noted during 2013/4 (Keane and Heinz 2015). This was attributed to the move from a one-year postgraduate teaching programme to the more costly two-year Professional Master of Education (PME). Recent research by Keane, Heinz, and Lynch (2022), indicates that little has changed, they identified the following key barriers encountered by under-represented groups in ITE: finance, part-time work, and issues relating to identity and belonging.

Students from low-income socio-economic contexts may be victims of socio-economic blindness and deficit thinking as they navigate the system. A lack of encouragement by teachers, insufficient guidance support, and poor perceptions of academic capabilities and life possibilities due to low-income background was also reported (Keane, Heinz, and Lynch 2018). Low-income SEG status was seen as a determinant for placement in a non-university track, even though the student had high grades (Lampert, Burnett, and Lebhers 2016). In third level, discrimination based on SEG status was evident in the allocation of teacher placements, with working-class student teachers given placements in the more difficult inner-city schools, and also

the provision of elocution lessons which suggested subliminal messages about social class dialects (Maguire 2005a).

Researchers have also conceptualised the social dynamics of low-income students as they navigate higher education, for example, feelings of isolation and the occurrence of distancing behaviours have been recorded. Liz recounted that she felt cut off from her old friends when she started college; they thought she was posh for attending higher education whilst they were all working (Maguire 2005a). This sentiment is akin to those shared by Jenny (Burn 2001), who felt the social cost of entering into higher education was high. Jenny was seen as a *"traitor to her class"* (Burn 2001, 88) because the accomplishment of entering university separated her from her community. Feelings of isolation can persist on entering the profession, Maguire (2005b) reports that teachers from low-income SEGs can feel like outsiders in the staffroom and can have a better affinity with the students and auxiliary staff.

Evidence of subservient distancing and status-maintaining distancing was found in Keane's (2011) study of peer relationships between working-class students and traditional entry middle-class students in Higher Education (HE). The working-class students had all entered HE via a pre-entry course. Students distanced from one another by forming groups or cliques based on commonalities including socio-economic background, similar interests, prior friendships, and living arrangements. Distancing due to social peacocking emerged, as working-class students expressed feelings of inferiority for not having suitably branded clothing or the correct appearance. The underlying motive for distancing was regarded as self-protection, a rejection of others before they rejected you. Keane (2011, 461) cautions that

distancing behaviours perpetuate inequality and may be "self-limiting, and perhaps self-sabotaging" for working-class students as the creation of social connections is essential for building social capital and networking.

Van Galan (2010, 254) comments on the "distinctive social space" occupied by students as they cross social borders and construct new social identities. She asserts that their complex upwardly mobile social positioning is a product of their historic disadvantage and current privilege. Van Galen gives personal insight into her own academic journey, having distanced herself from her background she never discussed her difficulties with her fellow students: "It would not have occurred to me that my colleagues stood to learn anything from me, about lives very different from their own... I was the naïve one in the group; I was grateful to just be among them" (Van Galan 2010, 266).

Teachers from low-income SEGs can feel influenced to change their appearance and reinvent themselves to conform to the norm (Lampert et al. 2016). Maguire's (2005a) research further explored the dilemmas of class, role, and identity. She describes shifts in identity as nomadic, crossing back and forth depending on contextual situations. Some of the participants played with identities to highlight certain elements of their character and down-played others depending on the context.

2.2.3 Habitus and capital

Theory and research suggest that becoming is a complex process of obtaining and leveraging social status. For teachers from low-income backgrounds, this involves navigating toward a future while confronting shifts in identity that may threaten old

forms of confidence and social currency. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and class are central to Van Galan's (2010) research on working class students in higher education. Bourdieu's concept of habitus explains how social structures, such as class, condition an individual in how they perceive the world and act accordingly. It is a system of long-lasting schemata, of dispositions of "being, seeing, acting, and thinking" (Hillier and Rooksby 2016, 43). Habitus is a subconscious process influenced by family, school, peers, and environment, which culminates in a sense of self. It can be an intuitive process that tells you how to be, how to dress and how to act in society. Habitus influences practice: however, practice is also influenced by field and the interrelationship between field and habitus. The concept of field, according to Bourdieu in the theory of social practice, is a specific social space which is characterised by its own rules, dynamics, social norms, and hierarchies. Bourdieu (1984, 101) uses the following representation to explain the connection: *(habitus x capital) + field = practice*. Power dynamics, within a field, can be influenced by cultural, economic, social, and symbolic capital.

Bourdieu (1986, 78) described capital as "the principle underlying the immanent irregularities of the world". He used the concept of capital to theorise how the 'scholastic achievement' of children was influenced by more than academic ability and natural aptitude. He explained that success was also due to the amount and type of capital in the child's possession. The social world is influenced by capital, "a force inscribed in the objectivity of things, so that everything is not equally possible or impossible" (1986, 78). Social capital is capital accrued from having possession of a network of relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, such as

membership of a society or a family name. Symbolic capital refers to capital accrued based on prestige and reputation. Cultural capital has three forms; *embodied*, which is the disposition of the mind and body; *objectified*, which relates to material objects that have cultural meaning; and *institutionalised*, which refers to academic qualifications. Economic capital refers to financial resources such as income and assets. Bourdieu posits that economic capital is at the root of the other types of capital.

Bourdieu's (1986) view that capital is a form of currency which can be used to maintain social positions permeates much of the research. An elevated level of cultural capital makes it easier to access other forms of capital. The more capital possessed by an individual, the more likely they are part of, or close to, the dominant societal group(s). Success in aspects of society, such as education, wealth, and social status are more likely if an individual's culture and identity is closely aligned to that of the dominant culture and identity. Tension exists in this space as students construct new social identities to enable the process of social mobility. This hybrid identity is also acknowledged by Burns (2018), he refers to the complex habitus of working-class student teachers as an amalgam of their past life, often succeeding against the odds, and their present lives as middle-class professionals.

The mannerisms of distancing behaviour exhibited by working-class students, suggest an oppositional habitus towards higher education institution and general student body (Keane 2011). Feelings of not belonging presented as self-segregating behaviour motivated by self-protection. These mannerisms were also evident in Jones' (2019) research which indicates two broad responses in relation to crossing social class

boundaries by novice teachers. Firstly, participants from working-class backgrounds avoided crossing boundaries, preferring to teach in familiar class settings whereby their cultural capital enabled them to act as role models and empathise with young people from the same social class as themselves. The second, less frequent, response was to strategically disassociate oneself from one's class identity in order to avail of different teaching opportunities.

The relevance of social class, even when it is not overt and articulated, as it permeates a person's conditioning and their relationships with others, is illustrated in Reay's (1997) research. She posits that working-class habitus is evident in the lack of educational information, relationships with others, and unfamiliarity with the issues of higher education. She suggests that a person with a prominent level of cultural capital may be more adept at expressing themselves and appearing assertive; whereas a person with lower capital may appear apologetic and lack certainty. Working-class does not merely consider low-income status, it also encompasses the difficulties which arise due to lacking the means to live in ways which are valued by the individual and others (Sayer 2007). Sayer contends that shame is likely endemic to experiences of class, due to unequal distribution of access to valued ways of living.

Teachers' professional identity does not develop independently from their own narratives of privilege or poverty (Van Galen, 2008). Lucey et al. (2003) write that social mobility challenges individuals to renegotiate their identity and that the process requires loss as well as gains. They note that the losses are fundamental to, and unavoidable in, change. Furthermore, navigating this complicated identity work can engender shame. Van Galen's research suggests that issues of class also

permeate teacher agency and therefore may influence practices. She argues that agency and efficacy may be distributed unevenly which may have consequences for teachers trying to challenge the system.

2.2.4 Community cultural wealth

There is a tacit understanding that Bourdieu's recognised forms of capitals are associated with those of middle and upper class systems and therefore the agency of working-class, or low-income SEGs, is not acknowledged because their capital is misrecognised (McKenzie 2015). Community cultural wealth is applicable to this research because it challenges traditional deficit interpretations of cultural capital. Yosso (2005) argues that Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital places value on a narrowly defined range of assets defined by White, middle-class values. Yosso shifts the focus to the forms of capital, or dynamic processes, possessed by marginalised groups which are frequently overlooked, these include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capitals.

Aspirational capital refers to a persons' resiliency in retaining their hopes for the future in the face of adversity and barriers. *Navigational capital* refers to the ability to draw on ones' social and psychological skill set to navigate or negotiate social systems and institutions. *Social capital* considers the networks of community resources, peer groups, and social contacts that are drawn on to provide practical and or emotional support. *Linguistic capital* encapsulates the oral language skills developed through communication in multiple languages or language styles as they connect with different audiences. *Familial capital* is the cultural knowledge derived from, and nurtured by, being a member of a family, which invokes kinship. The

understanding of family in this context is extended beyond traditional concepts and can include extended family members and communities. Finally, r*esistant capital* is understood as the skills and knowledge developed through resisting the dominant messages and patterns in society.

The manner in which post-primary teachers from low-income SEGs leverage their community cultural wealth is unreported in the Irish context. Research, which focused on the community cultural wealth of academics from working-class backgrounds in higher education, indicates that there exists the potential for a working-class privilege (Luczaj 2023) which is comprised of wisdom, navigational capital, working-class pedagogy, and rebellious dispositions. Working-class academics, described as agents of change (Arner 2021), may exhibit innovative teaching approaches which centre on social justice and embrace shared experiences (Crew 2020). This research will explore whether similar findings can be expected with respect to teachers from low-income SEGs.

2.3 Self-disclosure, making the invisible visible

As previously outlined in chapter one, characteristics and traits of low-income SEG status may not be easily identified and may rely on self-disclosure by the individual teacher. Understanding the influential capacities of teachers with respect to representation and shared group membership requires a nuanced understanding of the potential complexities associated with self-disclosure. In this section, the stance of the field in relation to defining self-disclosure, the purposes of self-disclosure, and self-disclosure in the classroom will be presented.

2.3.1 Defining self-disclosure

Self-disclosure, as defined in the foundational work of Sidney Jourard (1971), is the act of allowing one's true self be known to others. It is a process which can require courage and vulnerability and is facilitated by reciprocity. There is intent in the decision to share (or not share) ones' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Within an educational setting, self-disclosure refers to the sharing of personal and professional information by the instructor or teacher, which can lead to an increase in trust and a decrease in power imbalances (Golstein and Benassi 1994). Self-disclosure can be viewed as a rich source of communication between the teacher and students (Fusani 1994). Research from Rassmussen and Mishna (2008) specified the following dimensions of disclosures in their definition: 1) those relating to the self, 2) aspects of professional practice, 3) world or personal views, 4) responses to events, and 5) personal history. They add that each dimension of disclosure can also range in intensity from trivial to profound and can be considered low or high risk.

For the purposes of this research, drawing particularly on dimensions one and five above, disclosure refers to the conscious and intended practice by teachers, from low-income SEGs, of explicitly sharing information relating to their personal backgrounds and life stories with their students.

2.3.2 Purpose of self-disclosure

The types of self-disclosure which occur in the classroom may relate to information to clarify or validate the content of a lesson (Henry and Thorsen 2021), while other purposes focus on the relational dimension of teaching and aim to create a positive classroom climate and develop teacher-student relationships (Zhang et al. 2009). The

types of disclosures relating to the relational aspect which have been reported include: sexual orientation (Allen 1995; Cain 1996; McWilliams and Penuel 2016; Conrad 2020), disability (Gilson 2000), political issues (Hess 2009; Gellar 2020), and sharing social class status (Keane, Heinz, and Lynch 2020).

Teacher self-disclosure in the classroom consists of three aspects: amount, valence, and relevance (Cayanus and Martin 2008). *Amount* refers to the frequency of disclosure by the teacher, *valence* refers to the positive and negative effects of disclosures, and *relevance* relates to the relevancy of the disclosure to the curriculum being taught. From a psychological perspective, there are six positive aspects of self-disclosure: to experience emotional closeness, affirmation and validation by others, for identity formation, to develop self-understanding, to achieve authenticity, and for catharsis (Farber 2006). Possible negative consequences of self-disclosure include: risk of rejection, fear of burdening others, creating undesired impressions, regret for not sharing sooner, increased vulnerability, and a sense of shame (Kowalski 1999).

2.3.3 Self-disclosure in the classroom

Research on the use of self-disclosure in the classroom and the impact of teacher self-disclosure on relationships with their students has been linked to positive outcomes in the classroom. Students have been reported to take a more active role in the classroom and have shown greater interest (Goldstein and Benassi 1994; Cayanus, Martin, and Weber 2003). Purposeful disclosure may also enhance student autonomy and develop critical empathic reasoning (Conrad 2020). An increase in student perceptions in relation to teacher clarity (Wambach and Brothen 1997) and affective learning (Sorensen 1989) has also been indicated. Cayanus et al.’s (2003) research

indicates a positive correlation between teacher disclosure within the classroom and the likelihood of engagement in further communication out of the classroom. Teacher self-disclosure which enhances teacher-student relationships, may in turn increase perceived knowledge gain and classroom satisfaction by the student (Song, Kim, and Luo 2015).

Caution is advised on the frequency of self-disclosure; too little or too much can lead to negative learning environment (Cayanus and Martin 2004). A lack of self-disclosure could hinder teacher-student relationships, as the students may perceive the teacher to be cold and unfriendly. Research in the social work classroom setting also suggests that disclosures which lead to increased admiration of the teacher could lead to closer, more positive, student–teacher relationships, however disclosures which devalue the teacher's status may create distance between the student and teacher (Rassmussen and Mishna 2008).

2.3.4 Teacher self-disclosure and socio-economic status

Scant attention has been given to self-disclosures by teachers relating to socio-economic status. Keane et al. (2020) focused on the experiences of student teachers, from working-class backgrounds, in sharing the classed self. Their findings suggest that student-teachers from this socio-economic group desired to be approachable, relatable and inclusive due to their positionality. The participants expressed that being relatable and inclusive was achieved by disclosing their own personal experiences to students from similar backgrounds to themselves.

Crew's work on working class academics (2020) is somewhat applicable to this research. She suggests that there are benefits to students in relation to 'coming out', by enabling yourself to be seen and heard, it provides clear example to students from low-income backgrounds and provides opportunities for honest discussions about barriers and how to overcome them. One of the participants in her research admitted that she felt she contributed to the silence associated with class by not being open about her own SEG background.

More recently, Keane (2023a) ascribed the term class chameleoning to represent how student teachers from working-class backgrounds behave differently in different contexts. The majority of students in her study were motivated to adopt class matching behaviours to fit in and avoid being looked down on in their school placements. The student teachers performed 'up' by deliberately, or sometime unconsciously, imitating the body language, accents, and speech patterns of those around them. The student teachers were also selective in sharing their experiences.

In an effort to address this gap in the literature, this research will explore the following: Do teachers from low-income SEGs disclose their status to students? For what purposes do teachers from low-income SEGs disclose?

2.4 Role Modelling

This section begins by defining the term role model. It then moves to consider representation in the teaching profession and the implications in relation to role models and shared group membership. Consideration is then given to the research on representation of 'a teacher like me' which focuses on racial and ethnic matching.

Whilst research with respect to shared group membership and socio-economic status is limited, research from the aforementioned perspectives provided useful insights on how to conceptualise and approach my own study.

2.4.1 Conceptualisation of Role Model

The term role model is generally credited to sociologist Robert Merton (1957). Conceptualising the term is more complex as it holds different meanings in the research literature and is not always articulated explicitly (Brownhill 2015). Role models are commonly associated with a person of influence, such as a parent, teacher, or leader, who is admired or who can inspire others to imitate or emulate behaviour or goals (Solomon 1997; Gauntlett 2002). The imitation or emulation of a role models is a form of observational or social learning (Bandura and Walters 1977).

More recently, Morgenroth, Ryan, and Peters (2015), integrated the different interpretations of the concept and proposed that role models serve three recurring and interrelated functions: *goal embodiment, attainability,* and *desirability*. The first function, *goal embodiment*, refers to demonstrating how to perform a skill or achievement and is comparable to Merton's use of the term. This form of behavioural modelling includes cognitive and emotional strategies to enhance success. The second function, *attainability*, focuses on representation of what is possible. This function is reflected in the phrase *you have to see it to be it*. Attainability is not concerned with how to achieve a goal or task, instead the message is that the goal or task is achievable, primarily because you can see someone who has already achieved the goal. Attainability is influenced by, but not limited to, shared group membership, personal similarity between the aspirant and the model, and level of the model's

success. The third function, *desirability*, encompasses the inspirational embodiment of role modelling. Within this function, the individual sets their goals, generally newly considered, because they are inspired by a role model. The status, attributes or values of the role model are perceived as desirable which leads to admiration, identification, and internalisation.

Morgenroth et al. (2015) suggest a framework for the Motivational Theory of Role Modelling, illustrated in Figure 2.1, which integrates the three functions of role models and extends to include the motivational process of role aspirants. They define a role aspirant as an individual who makes conscious or subconscious decisions about who to emulate or follow. They posit that the role aspirant's self-efficacy (Bandura 1977) is integral to the process.

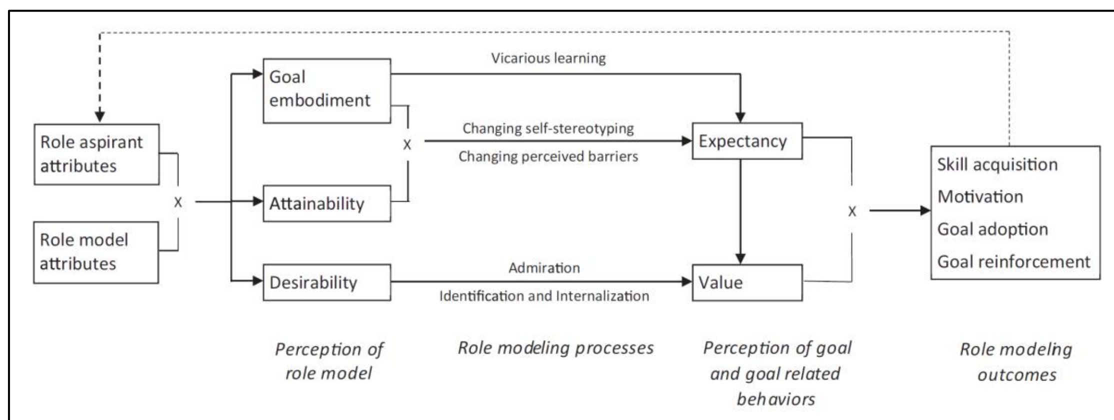

Figure 2.1. The Motivational Theory of Role Modelling. Morgenroth et al. (2015)

The framework outlines that the attributes of both the role model and role aspirant combine to develop the perceived function of the role model as goal embodiment, attainability and/or desirability. Through role modelling processes, which can include vicarious learning, challenging self-stereotyping and perceived barriers, admiration,

identification and internalisation, the role aspirants' expectancy-values alter. Consequently, this results in the following role modelling outcomes: skill acquisition, motivation, goal adoption, and goal reinforcement.

Morgenroth et al.'s framework provides a cohesive design which could unearth insights into the role modelling experiences of teachers from low-income SEGs from the dual perspectives of 1) being a role aspirant in becoming a teacher and 2) being a role model to students like themselves.

2.4.2 Representation and the teaching profession in Ireland

Inherent in Morgenroth et al.'s framework is the potential for role modelling when representation or shared group membership exists, however, the teaching profession in Ireland is not representative of the student body (The Teaching Council 2011; Schleicher 2014; Heinz and Keane 2018). The demography of the teaching profession and entrants into initial teacher education at post-primary level in Ireland can be described as a homogenous group of high academic ability, which is over-represented by women and people from farming backgrounds compared to the general population. The low representation of entrants from the Travelling Community, immigrant families, people from low-income socio-economic backgrounds and people with disabilities is not reflective of the composition of society in general (Killeavy 1993; Clarke 2009; Keane and Heinz 2016; Darmody and Smyth 2016).

Fundamental arguments for the diversification of the teaching profession centre on the basis of improved representation (Dee 2005; Villegas and Irving 2010; Keane, Heinz, and McDaid 2023). For example, Childs et al. (2011) advocate that teacher

education programmes enable *equity in* access for the applicants who apply and also *equity through* access due to the educational influences the applicants will have on future generations of students on entering the profession. Childs at al. (2011) also claim that in addition to the provision of role models, increased diversity enables for the development of culturally responsive society due to interactions with teachers of different experiences, perspectives, and social identities. Research in the Irish context upholds this perspective; Heinz and Keane (2018) argue that having a diverse teaching population benefits the individual students from under-represented backgrounds in gaining equity of access, and also benefits schools, students, and society as a whole.

2.4.3 A teacher like me

Research relating to shared group matching between teachers and students, which primarily focuses on gender, racial, and ethnic matching (Dee 2005, 2007; Paredes 2013; Redding 2019), indicates shared group matching has positive effects on student achievement, educational experiences, and expectations. For instance, Dee (2005) suggests demographically similar teachers could potentially influence student's educational outcomes through passive and active interactions. Dee ascribed the term passive teacher effects, such as the role model effect, to situations whereby the presence of a teacher of similar race, gender, or ethnicity raises a student's academic expectations and motivations. Secondly, active teacher effects describe the unintended biases in own-race teachers' interactions with, and prior expectations of, students with different demographic characteristics. Dee's research indicated that race, gender, and ethnicity have large effects on teacher perception of student

performance. Notably, the effects linked with racial and ethnic dynamics appeared concentrated among students from lower socio-economic groups.

Potential benefits of shared group matching of minority ethnic students include higher teacher expectations and an increased inclination to address racism related issues (Villegas and Irvine 2010), the potential for teachers to act as cultural translators and positive role models (Keane and Heinz 2016), and the potential for shared cultural understanding between the teacher and student (Redding 2019). Research exploring the intersectionality of race and SEG status found that for low-SEG white students, representation had significant positive effects on teacher-student relationship quality. However, for low-SEG black students, racial representation had a higher contributing factor to relationship quality, regardless of the SEG status of the teacher (Vinopal 2020). The impact of shared group matching with regard to socio-economic groupings in Ireland is under explored. A study on mentoring programmes for Irish students from working-class SEGs found that having mentors from similar communities enhanced the development of trust and assimilation of new information (Hannon, Faas, and O'Sullivan 2017).

It is important to acknowledge that shared group matching and role modelling opportunities should not be seen as a panacea to address inequities within the education system and society in general. The provision of appropriate role models can also be viewed as deficit thinking, as such greater discourse on the structural failures of the education system is warranted (Alexander 2022). Diversity tokenism and matching approaches can counteract equity and inhibit transformation in school and society (Heinz and Keane 2018). Sensitivity is needed within the area of role

modelling to avoid burnout of teachers from minority groups and to prevent identity reproduction. Differences in nationality, immigrant generation, and sociohistorical patterns can hinder the development of a shared cultural understanding (Redding 2019).

I concur with existing research which supports the view that challenging inequity is the collective responsibility of the teaching profession and ultimately requires systemic change. Further consideration of the role modelling experiences of teachers from low-income socio-economic backgrounds may provide valuable insights into the factors for deliberation in order to support and sustain a collective approach to addressing inequity and enacting change.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has served to give an insight into the experiences of teachers from low-income backgrounds in relation to: becoming, disclosure, and role modelling. Research on becoming broadly suggests that teachers from low-income SEGs are strongly motivated by social justice, are attuned to the needs of students like themselves, and wish to advocate on behalf of their students. It is also suggested that teachers from this SEG find themselves in a complex habitus which can lead to isolating behaviours. This can manifest through upward social mobility and a disassociation from one's background or through avoidance of interaction with middle-class colleagues due to feelings of inadequacy or not sensing a common goal. The renegotiation of identity due to being from a low-income background and entering the largely predominant middle-class profession presents a quandary in

relation to self-disclosure and subsequent role modelling potential. The retention or disassociation of one’s working-class identity may have an impact on the motivation and potential to act as a role model for students from similar backgrounds. Additionally, the undercurrents of deficit thinking associated with Bourdieu’s forms of capital and role modelling appear to be at odds with the social justice oriented motivations of teachers from low-income backgrounds. Yosso’s construct of community cultural wealth may provide an alternative perspective to frame the manner in which teachers from low-income SEGs interact with students from similar backgrounds. This research is warranted as it draws on the narratives of teachers from low-income SEGs to establish their lived experiences with respect to these concerns.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Having presented the literature review in the previous chapter, I now turn the focus to the specificities of my own research on what the life stories of post-primary teachers from low-income SEGs tell us about their role modelling experiences. I will begin by explaining the epistemological position of the research and discuss how this underpins decisions made in relation to the initial research design and subsequent implementation. Having situated the research within the interpretive paradigm with a critical relational ontology, I will then discuss the compatibility of Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) to the research and justify decisions made in relation to the sampling approach taken. Next, the approach to data collection, namely BNIM subsession interviews (Wengraf 2006, 2012, 2022), and an overview of the process of data analysis are provided. Finally, the strategies and considerations taken to address concerns in relation to trustworthiness and ethics throughout the research process are explained.

3.2 Philosophical considerations

In this section, I will present the philosophical perspectives underpinning this research. Consideration will be given to the interplay between questions on the nature of existence and reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), how to conduct research (methodology), and how they are intertwined with my own values and beliefs (axiology). These complex underlying assumptions are important to provide a frame of reference and rationale for how this research was conducted.

Assumptions associated with ontology will influence epistemological assumptions which, consequently, shape methodological considerations (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995); this is not a linear process, but rather the layers are interwoven and interconnected (Guba and Lincoln 1994). My own beliefs and values have previously been considered in my positionality statement in chapter one.

The ontological commitment of this research focuses on relational and critical domains. Firstly, in considering the relational dimension, this research is concerned with the human relations involved in role modelling practices and how these practices are interplayed in the context of the educational system. I acknowledge that, as individuals, people are shaped by their experiences of social structures and systems, their relationships with others, and the broader cultural contexts which influence their social worlds. A relational ontology also considers the underlying relationship between the participants and the researcher in narrative research (Clandinin, Cain, and Huber 2016). Working alongside the participants to co-construct their narratives is a relational process, as narrative work is an experience "storied both in the living and the telling" (Clandinin 2019, 235).

Secondly, a critical ontology is relevant as it places an emphasis on the social, economic, and institutional processes that shape the social reality of teachers from low-income SEGs. Critical ontology aims to uncover and challenge power relations, including those associated with data collection. The decision to situate the experiences of the participants in terms of their community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005) was influenced by a critical ontology. Underpinned by Dewey's theory of experience, critical narrative inquiry explores how the individual's stories are shaped,

expressed and enacted within social, cultural, and institutional confines (Clandinin, Caine, and Lessard 2018).

This study is positioned in the interpretive paradigm, which is characterised by concern for the individual (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2018) with a central endeavour to understand the subjective world of human experience. Knowledge is culturally derived, historically situated, and involves a level of interpretation (Burke and Dempsey 2021). From an interpretive perspective, the interconnectedness of people and the dynamic nature of relationships and their social worlds are emphasised and utilised to explore how people derive meaning from their experiences (Hickson 2016). Narrative inquiry embraces a participatory form of research as the researcher makes inquiries of the participants' experiences, considers their own experiences, and also the development of co-constructed experiences through the research process (Clandinin 2006). The researcher lives on the landscape, and research is carried out *with* the participants and not *on* the participants. Within an interpretive paradigm the methodology of narrative inquiry is appropriate as it intertwines the person's lived experiences with critical awareness, attentiveness, and analysis, and it enables the connections between individual stories and broader educational possibilities to be seen (Todd 2018). The combined philosophical foundations of narrative research and critical reflection enables the explicit deconstruction of participants' stories to interrogate the construction of knowledge, power, and reality (Hickson 2016).

3.3 Research Design

The overall design aim of this research was to construct a framework that would reveal the rich and diverse experiences of teachers from low-income SEGs in relation to role modelling. The participants and their intricate stories are at the centre of the research. Narrative inquiry is underpinned by Dewey's (1938) theory of experience (Clandinin and Connelly 2000), which highlights the role of reflection and inquiry in the learning process and acknowledges that learning occurs through both personal experiences and collaborative interactions. Underscoring the narrative trilogy of temporality, place, and sociality are interaction and continuity enacted in situations (Clandinin 2019). The interconnectedness of narrative and human experience, the telling and retelling, and the interpretation and reinterpretation, captures professional experience in a manner distinct to empirical methods. Narrative inquiry is suited to exploring the subtleties and complexities of a person's lived experience in teaching and learning (Webster and Mertova 2007). Webster and Mertova propose that the growth and popularity of narrative inquiry is partly due to the constraints and incompatibility of conventional research methods when researching the complexity of human actions. Narrative inquiry enables researchers to examine the impact and understanding of a person's experiences which is often overlooked in quantitative research.

Narrative inquiry is subjective, it provides a rendition of how a person perceives their lived experiences and is essentially a strategy of human expression (Kim 2015). It seeks to capture, analyse, and illuminate underlying insights and assumptions surrounding a person's experiences. Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method

(BNIM) is fitting for this research as it places the participants' voices at the centre of the research and focuses on the reality of their experiences. BNIM was developed by Wengraf (2006, 2012, 2022) in the mid-nineties based on the work by Rosenthal and Chamberlayne. The structure of BNIM is an appropriate method of identifying the experiences, influences, and meanings associated with role modelling practices of teachers from low-income SEGs.

Webster and Mertova (2007, 104) propose a framework for narrative research which is both governed and justified by the two factors of *human centredness* and *complexity of human experience*. The distinguishing emphasis of this framework is the emphasis on "the interest in participants, their relationships, the structures they work within and the instruments used in an attempt to capture their stories of experience". There are four constituent parts to this methodological framework: research processes, negotiations that occur, risks that may arise, and preparation and auditing of results.

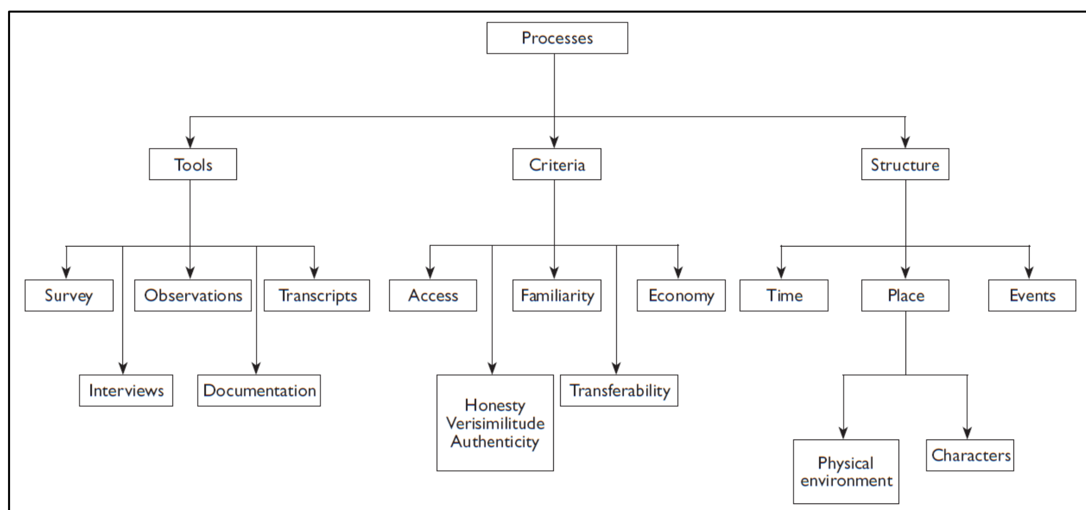

Figure 3.1 Outline of narrative inquiry processes (Webster and Mertova, 2007, 106).

Research processes, described by Webster and Mertova as the most complex part, is further subdivided into *tools*, *criteria,* and *structure* as shown above, figure 3.1.

The first process, *tools* or data instruments for the research is comprised of the BNIM interviewing method and subsequent transcripts. An in-depth account of the usage of BNIM, which has been described as a method and a methodology (Wengraf 2012), is provided in section 3.5.1. The second process, *criteria*, focused on the validity and reliability of the research, this will be discussed in greater detail in section 3.6. In this research, *access* to direct quotations and the reconstruction of the participant's life stories supports authenticity. BNIM interviews and subsequent transcriptions were conducted by me to ensure *familiarity* with the data. The third, and final, process is concerned with *structure,* that is the context and setting of the research. Provision of contextual detail and placing the participants' voices at the forefront of the research serves not only become familiar with the participants, but also enables a greater understanding of the structures and systems that influenced and impinged upon them (Webster and Mertova 2007).

The research design was influenced by Keane's (2015) participatory approach to research and features researcher reflexivity, participant involvement, and contextual detail. Firstly, an emphasis on researcher reflexivity, which required the inclusion of a critical autobiographical reflection on presentation of the research (see section 1.5). Secondly, the involvement of the participants in the presentation of the interpretations. The final process saw the inclusion of the participants' voices and contextual descriptions in the presentation of interpretations. The inclusion of direct quotes in the interpretations places the participants' voices at the centre of the

research. The integrity of the research was thus strengthened by using a methodological approach that was compatible with the theoretical frame and underpinning philosophical assumptions.

3.4 Research sample

The sampling method implemented in this research was snowball sampling, whereby a small number of participants are approached who meet the inclusion criteria for the study. These participants in turn, identify additional participants who meet the criteria for inclusion, (Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison 2018). Snowball sampling uses personal and professional contacts and social networks of friends and acquaintances to gain access to participants, thus interpersonal relations feature highly (Browne 2005). Snowball sampling, because it relies on social relations of friends, contacts, and acquaintances, can reduce power dynamics between researcher and participants (Noy 2008). Snowball sampling can be valuable when researching hidden populations which may guard their privacy (Heckathorn 1997). It can also be beneficial with hard-to-reach cohorts if the researcher is a member of the group being researched (Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison 2018). This sampling method was appropriate to the research context based on the aforementioned features.

A small sample size of six participants was recruited, this enabled deeper interrogation and critical analysis of the participants' experiences and aligns with the methodological principles of BNIM (Wengraf 2022). Snowball sampling in this research started with me and utilised my personal and professional networks. Four participants were recruited directly by me, the remaining two were recruited through

personal and professional contacts, (figure 3.2). None of the participants recruited were able to recruit another participant. This may be due to a number of reasons: participants may not have been willing to self-disclose to colleagues, participants may not have known other teachers from low-income SEGs, or participants may have acted as gatekeepers and protected friends by not referring them (Browne 2005; Heckathorn 1997).

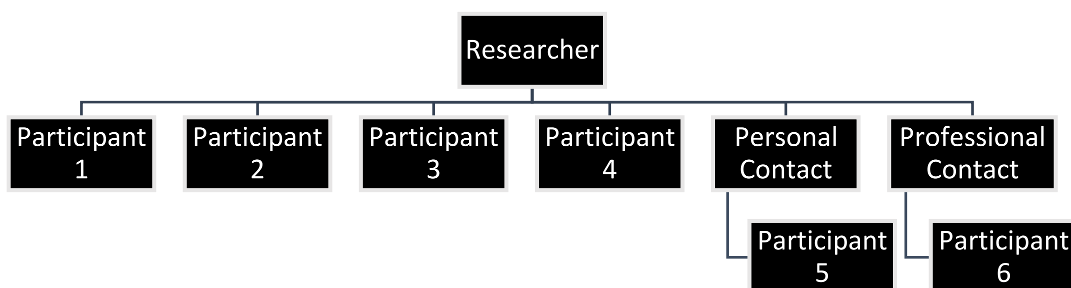

Figure 3.2 Recruitment of sample

As this study explores the experiences of role modelling of teachers from low-income backgrounds, the first criterion for inclusion in the sample population was that the participant identified as being a member of a low-income SEG prior to becoming a post-primary teacher. This study also examines the perceptions of teachers in relation to being a role model for students from low-income backgrounds, therefore the second criterion was that the participant was currently teaching or had taught in a post-primary school which was under the remit of the Department of Education's *Delivering equality of opportunity in schools'* scheme (DEIS), for a minimum of five years. Of the six participants (table 3.1), five were female and one was male.

Participants (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Teaching experience (years)	School Type (# years in the school)
Meabh	Female	6	Rural DEIS (3) Urban DEIS (3)
Neasa	Female	7	Rural DEIS (7)
Aoife	Female	6	Rural DEIS (5) Urban DEIS (1)
Conor	Male	15	Rural DEIS (6) Urban DEIS (1) Other (8)
Niamh	Female	20	Urban DEIS (20)
Gráinne	Female	15	Urban DEIS (15)

Table 3.1 Participants' background information

The sample recruited is not representative of the population, this is largely due to the broader demographics of the teaching profession and the inclusion criterion required for this research.

The small sample size also influenced the approach to conducting pilot interviews. Typically, pilot data is not included in a main study, so to mitigate losing valuable data I initially conducted practice interviews with family and friends to develop my interview skills. Initial interviews with participants were also treated as pilots; I asked the participants their opinion of the conduct of the interview and made notes in my reflective diary for changes and improvements, appendix I.

3.5 Data collection and analysis

Narrative research involves two active participants in lieu of interviewer and respondent who jointly construct narratives and meaning (Riessman 2008). Both participants have a role to play in the interpretive process, firstly, the sharing of lived experiences is selective and perspectival, secondly the subsequent analysis is open

to interpretation by the listener. The process of data collection and analysis for this research was informed by the interviewing principles of BNIM (Wengraf 2022), and Schutze's (1977) six step technique for analysis of narrative interviews. Combined, this formed a ten-step process, figure 3.3, which will be elaborated on in section 3.5.3. This will be preceded by an overview of BNIM, section 3.5.1, and an explanation of analysis of narratives, section 3.3.2.

3.5.1 Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method

BNIM is an analytic strategy, or method, which analyses the interrelation between three facets: Biography – the person's life story, in whole or in part; Narrative – how the story is told; Interpretive – how the story is interpreted in social context (Wengraf 2006, 2012, 2022). Exploring a person's biography gives a greater depth of understanding of their lived experiences by providing insights into the choices they make at different stages of their life (Corbally and O'Neill 2014). Narrative honours the person's lived experience by studying the storied lives of people, both in the living and the telling (Clandinin 2019). Interpretive recognises that analysis does not aim for an absolute truth due to subjectivity on the part of the teller and the listener, instead the focus is verisimilitude and plausibility (Denzin 1994). BNIM constitutes a 10-stage analytic process, however the approach is flexible with approximately 50% of researchers using the interviewing procedure and selecting other methods to analyse the data (Wengraf 2012). This research uses Wengraf's interviewing procedure only, while data analysis was guided by Schutze's (1977) technique.

Former variations of the BNIM interviewing technique comprised of at least two and sometimes three subsessions (Wengraf 2006, 2012). Subsessions one and two occur on the same day with a brief break, 15 minutes, between them. Wengraf, in the latest adaptation BNIM3 (2022), places additional emphasis on the importance of including subsession three. Subsession one focuses solely on a Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative (SQUIN) using a free-associative method. The SQUIN must be carefully crafted to empower the participants to construct, begin, and end the telling of their experiences on their own terms. The researcher listens, without interruption, and prepares questions for the next stage. BNIM demands that the researcher does not interrupt with their own insertions (Wengraf 2022). In subsession two, the researcher follows up solely on the content which has freely emerged in subsession one. Questions posed must be derived from subsession one to unpack the participants' shared experiences by *"pushing pausefully and gracefully"* for particular incident narratives (PINS) (Wengraf 2022, 27). The third subsession consists of semi-structured depth interviewing approximately one month after the first two subsessions. This time period is used to generate and review transcriptions and notes. Subsession three can be used to introduce new topics for discussion. In this research, the three subsessions approach was used with each participant.

Once BNIM interviewing is completed, the next stage is BNIM case interpretation. BNIM case interpretation is an intricate process which requires the involvement of review panels. I decided to use Schutze's approach to analysis of narratives in lieu of Wengraf's case interpretation approach due to time constraints, difficulty accessing training, and perceived challenges in recruiting and coordinating review panels.

3.5.2 Analysis of narratives

Polkinghorne (1995) identified two forms of narrative inquiry, *narrative analysis* and *analysis of narrative*. Narrative analysis concerns studies in which data consists of actions, events, and happenings; whereas analysis of narrative is concerned with data consisting of narratives or stories. Analysis of narratives, which is the form that was used in this study, *"*seeks to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data" (Polkinghorne 1995,14). Within analysis of narratives there are two further paradigmatic approaches. One approach inductively derives concepts from the data, the other approach uses previously derived concepts and determines if they occur in the data. The latter approach was predominantly used in this research.

A six-step technique for analysing narrative interviews, adapted from the works of Schutze (1977) by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), was utilised.

1. Detailed and high-quality transcription.
2. Separation of text into indexical and non-indexical content
3. Use of indexical components to order events for each individual and create trajectories.
4. Investigation of the non-indexical components; the opinions, concepts, theories, reflections, and values.
5. Clustering and comparison between individuals' trajectories.
6. Recognition of collective trajectories and similarities established.

These six processes were amalgamated with Wengraf's interviewing technique to form a ten-step process of data collection and analysis, figure 3.3. This will be detailed in the next section.

3.5.3 Ten step process of research and analysis

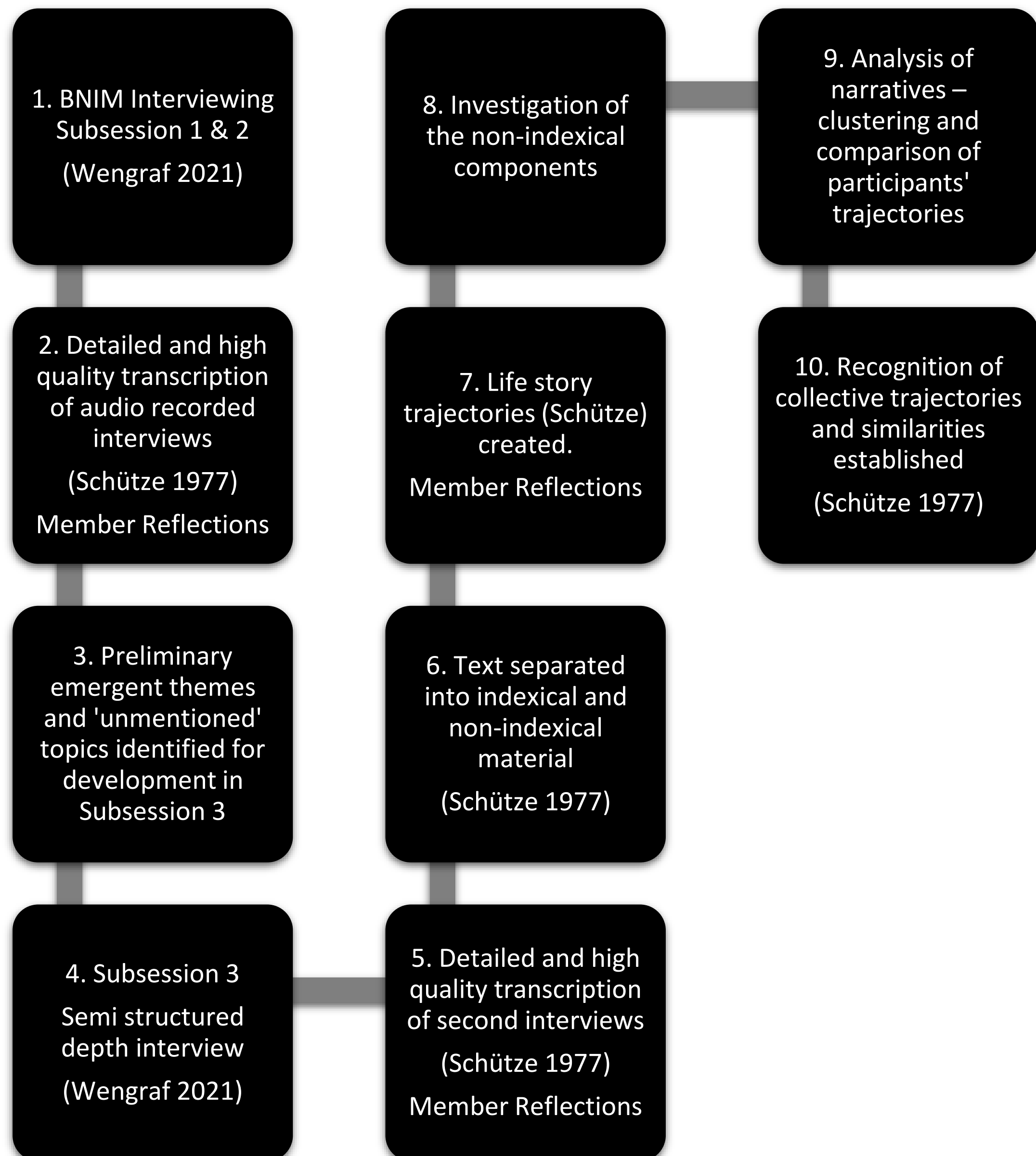

Figure 3.3 Ten step process of research and analysis

Step 1: BNIM Interviewing Subsession 1 and Subsession 2

Subsession 1 and 2 interviews were conducted over a five-month period, see figure 3.4. The location and format of the interview (face-to-face (f) or online (o)) was at the

discretion of the participant. A key feature of subsession one is the silence of the interviewer, this ensures the participants' voices are heard, participants have complete autonomy over the details they wish to share. The SQUIN used in subsession one was: *Will you please tell me the story of your life in relation to becoming a teacher, the events and the experiences that are important to you, you can begin wherever you like and I won't interrupt, but I might take notes if that's okay?* Notes were taken during the subsession using the BNIM interview page, (Wengraf, 2022), appendix II.

Subsession two took place on the same day as subsession one with a 10-15 minute break between the two. The duration of these interviews ranged between forty-five and eighty minutes. The questions in subsession two were specific to each participant and related to their responses to the SQUIN. Questions were constructed to probe for additional detail and clarity of particular incident narratives (PINS). Subsessions were audio recorded with the consent of the participant.

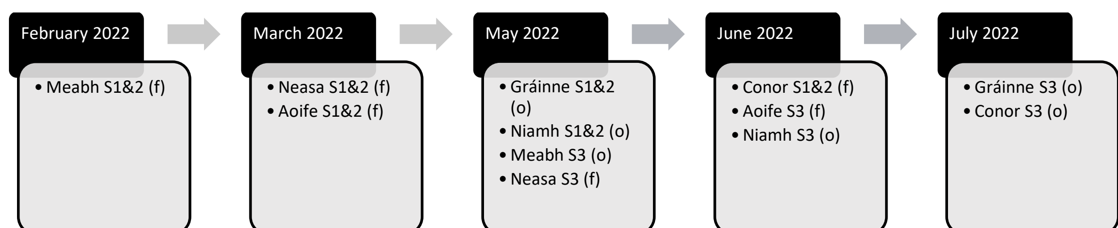

Figure 3.4 Timeline of BNIM interviews

Step 2: Detailed and high quality transcription of audio recorded interview and subsequent member reflections.

Transcriptions were completed by me within a week of the interview. This ensured familiarity with the information received. Participants were sent a copy of their

transcriptions of both subsessions and member reflections were invited. Member reflections (Tracy 2010) moved beyond validation that the transcriptions were accurate and provided scope for reflexive elaboration (Clarke and Braun 2013).

Step 3: Preliminary emergent themes and unmentioned topics identified for development in subsession 3

Following the first interview, audio files were re-listened to, and transcripts were reviewed to identify commonalities across the participants' shared stories. This first round of analysis also served to identify topics or gaps which were not mentioned in the first two sessions. Emergent concepts at this stage included: belonging/not belonging, career motivations, financial challenges, family values, disclosure, role models and people of influence. An unmentioned topic at this stage was the self as role model. Prompt questions were then prepared for subsession 3 which were tailored to suit each participant.

Step 4: Subsession 3 – Semi structured depth interviewing

Wengraf advises to wait for a period of one month between subsession 1 and 2, and subsession 3. In this research the wait time was delayed further due to issues in recruitment of the sample and availability of participants. Similar to subsession 1 and 2, the timing and location of subsession 3 was chosen by the participants. The duration of these subsessions ranged between forty and seventy minutes.

In a semi-structured interview, the questions are open ended. Questions may be tailored to each individual interviewee in relation to wording and sequencing depending on responses, probing and prompts may also be used (Cohen et al. 2018).

The prompt questions selected for each participant were posed to further induce narrative by using phrases such as *Can you tell me more about x?*, *In what way did x occur*? or *What happened then?*

Step 5: Detailed and high quality transcriptions of subsession 3

Similar to step 2, all transcriptions were completed within a short time frame following the third subsession. Again, transcriptions were shared with participants and the opportunity provided for member reflections.

Step 6: Text separated into indexical and non-indexical material

Indexical material is information which has a concrete reference (Jovechelovitch and Bauer 2000). They are statements of response to factual events: who, what, when, where and why. Non indexical material consists of argumentative and descriptive material and includes values, opinions, judgements, and reflections. This process constituted the beginning of the second stage of analysis and involved returning to the audio files and transcripts.

Step 7: Creation of Life Story Trajectories (Schütze 1977)

In this stage, the indexical material shared by the participants was analysed and placed in chronological order to present the individual life stories (Chapter 4). This process is similar to Wengraf's Biographical Data Chronology. To avoid the risk of disembodied text, the presentation of life stories was illuminated with direct quotes from the participants to provide contextual meaning. The completed interpretations

of the life stories were then shared with the participants to provide an additional opportunity for *member reflections* (Tracy 2010).

Step 8: Investigation of the non-indexical components

In the eighth step, the non-indexical material, that is the opinions, values, and reflections were examined as *knowledge analysis* to theorise the self-understanding of the participants at specific stages of their shared life story. During this stage, audio files were returned to, this ensured that participants' voices were heard as they could be lost by reading transcriptions alone. It was during this phase that I began to consider community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005) as a theory for positioning the participants' lived experiences.

Step 9: Analysis of narratives – clustering and comparison of participants' trajectories

Informed by Polkinghorne's (1995) analysis of narratives, this round of analysis consisted of reading and rereading the transcripts carefully, and considerately excavating the four themes: *Becoming, Disclosure of SEG background, Experiences of role models as a role aspirant*, and *Perceptions of being a role model*. As analysis of narratives involves the chronological and non-chronological dimensions (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000), this was a complex process, as themes do not merely emerge (Braun and Clarke 2012, 2021). Using MaxQDA, due to the volume of transcriptions, I assigned key words and concepts to excerpts of the texts, these key words were then grouped to create a code system. This was an iterative process as

many of the key words and codes overlapped due to the interconnectedness of the emergent themes.

Step 10: Recognition of collective trajectories

The final stage of analysis consisted of establishing the similarities across the individual life stories. My interpretations of the collective trajectories are presented in Chapter 5.

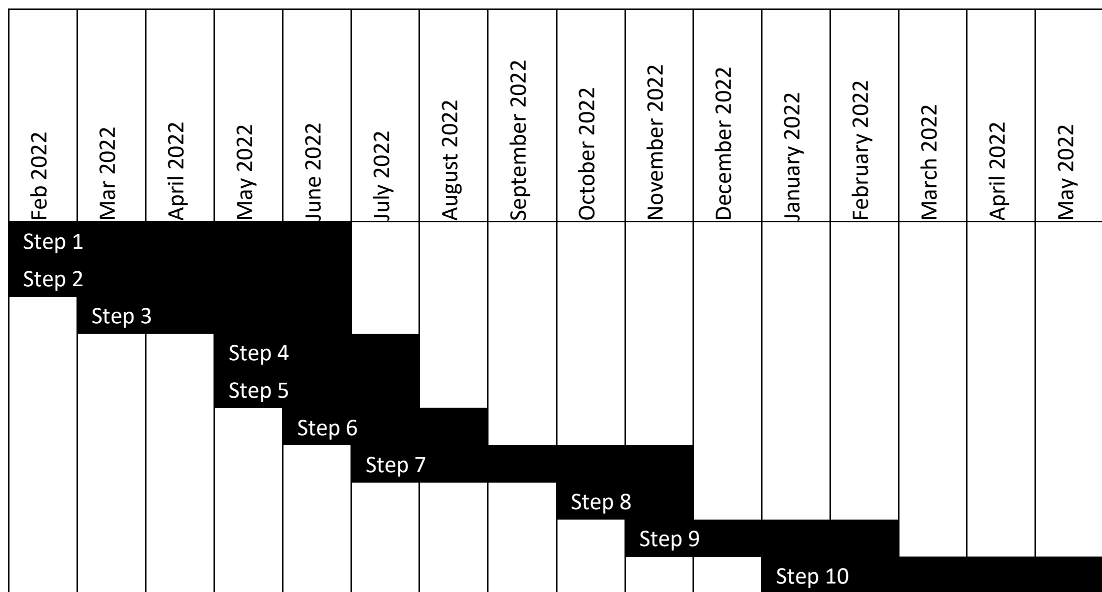

Figure 3.5 Timeline of the research process

3.6 Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

Narrative inquiry begins and ends with a respect for ordinary lived experience.

(Clandinin 2019)

Over three decades ago, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argued of the importance not to squeeze narrative criteria language into that associated with other forms of research. They suggested the criteria of apparency, verisimilitude, and transferability as a starting point. Furthermore, they posited that the researcher was best placed to

identify and defend the criteria applied to their work. Mishler (1990) echoed this viewpoint by recognising the tacit understanding held by researchers of their actual situated practices. Polkinghorne (1988) concurring with the avoidance of empirical terminology suggested that reliability in narrative research points to dependability, strength of analysis, trustworthiness, and ease of access of the data. Additional criteria suggested by Huberman (1995) include familiarity, authenticity, honesty, and economy. Underscoring each of these suggestions is the necessity to conduct narrative research in an ethical manner. In this section, I begin by describing the processes implemented to uphold the trustworthiness of this research, thereafter, the ethical considerations and commitments adhered to will be discussed.

Apparency, verisimilitude and transferability

Apparency relates to the clarity and transparency of the research process. I have addressed issues of apparency by clearly articulating a descriptive account of the research design, the approach to sampling, method of data collection, and analytical procedures earlier in this chapter. Verisimilitude refers to the believability and plausibility of the research. Verisimilitude can be established if the study resonates (Loh 2013) and seems real and alive (Creswell 2009). In this research, verisimilitude was established by capturing and presenting the genuine and representative narratives of the participants in an authentic manner. The provision of thick, detailed, dense descriptions (Denzin 1989) reinforces credibility by transporting the reader into the setting of the narrative (Creswell and Miller 2000). Throughout the interpretation chapter and discussion chapter, rich description is accompanied by contextual details and illuminated with direct quotes, emphasising the voices of the

participants. Transferability considers the extent to which the findings of this research can be transferred to other settings. The provision of thick contextual descriptions and detail throughout serves as a base to consider application in another setting (Webster and Mertova 2007).

Additional trustworthiness measures

The following techniques were utilised to further establish the trustworthiness of the research: Prolonged engagement, member reflections, and researcher reflexivity.

Prolonged engagement is a validity procedure which requires the researcher to remain at the research site for an extended period of time (Creswell and Miller 2000). The purpose of prolonged engagement is to establish trust and rapport with the participants. The extended time period also enables deeper understanding of participants' views. In this research, the participants either knew me or were referred to me by mutual friends or acquaintances which enabled the establishment of trust. Prolonged engagement was achieved through the multiple points of contact from initial invitation or request to participate in the research to the final extension of thanks for participating. The timeline of the research, presented in figure 3.5, situates the participants' involvement over the course of the research, key stages of involvement were steps 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7. To ensure consistency with the data, all transcriptions were completed by me. Multiple playbacks of the audio files and subsequent transcriptions and re-readings enhanced my familiarity with the participants' lived experiences which led to greater understanding and yielded meaningful interpretations.

The participants in the research were given the transcripts of each of the subsessions to view, comment on their accuracy, and to provide feedback or reflections. Moving beyond a mere validation approach, this process of member reflections (Tracy 2010) was an additional source of verification, ensuring I had represented the stories appropriately and accurately. Throughout the research, participants were asked if the themes and interpretations were realistic and appropriate. Member reflections from the participants included: *You've encapsulated my experience perfectly. I'm happy with everything in there. Well done, hope my info helps support your work* (Meabh); *Funny reading it all back...hope I didn't rant too much* (Niamh); and *Thank you so much for that. It reads really well and I'm very happy with my story* (Aoife). Inviting the participants for their feedback is an ethical approach (Loh 2013). Aoife was the only participant who indicated that minor clarifications were needed for her story, this information was corrected and integrated into the final presentations of the interpretation chapter.

Researcher reflexivity was demonstrated in chapter one with the declaration of my personal beliefs and biases, this allows the reader to understand my position. Creswell and Miller (2000) acknowledge the appropriateness of researcher reflexivity within the critical paradigm, wherein researchers' interpretations are shaped through reflection on the social, cultural, and historical forces at play. Throughout the research process a reflective journal was kept reflecting on my own positionality as a researcher. My own values and personal experiences as a teacher from a low-income SEG have brought a tacit understanding and a necessary sensitivity to the research area. To "identify, construct, critique, and articulate" my positionality, self-reflection

and reflexivity was both a “necessary prerequisite and an on-going process” (Holmes 2020, 2). I am cognisant that a reflexive approach was warranted, so that my own inherent assumptions did not influence the research and interfere with the narratives of the participants.

Ethical considerations and commitments

A relational ontological perspective resonates in the ethical considerations at the heart of this research. The relational ethical stance is upheld through accurate representation of the narrative and an avoidance of “attempts to tame, sanitize or analyse” the story, (Clandinin, Caine, and Huber 2016, 427). Central to the process of narrative inquiry are the experiences of the participants and the researcher (Clandinin and Murphy 2009). Narrative inquiry is concerned with real experiences of real people, as such it is difficult to predict the impact on participants; there is no way of knowing if the interview process or subsequent publication will cause distress, or to what extent (Josselson 2007). Additionally, narrative inquiry requires a practice of ethics whereby decision-making considers the “links, overlaps and differences between morals, ethics, ethical approaches, ethical frameworks, ethical regulations and legal regulations” (Wiles 2013, 11). Throughout this research process my first priority was always to the participants, as advocated by Clandinin (2019).

Plummer (2001, 228) postulates that there are five ethical principles that apply to narrative research. These are the principles of: respect, recognition, and tolerance for persons and their differences; promoting the caring of others; expanding

equalities, fairness and justice; enlarging spheres of autonomy, freedom and choice; and minimising harm.

Respect, recognition, and tolerance for the person was established by invoking a process of consent, prior to, and throughout each stage of the research. Participants were provided with clear information explaining the purpose, nature, and risks associated with the research during the initial recruitment phase, appendix III. At the beginning of each subsession, the voluntary nature of the research and the right of the participant to withdraw were reiterated. Participants were also afforded the right to decline to answer questions. Guarantees of confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability were given to participants. Ethical approval was granted from Maynooth University for this research, appendix IV.

Guided by the principle of *promoting the caring of others*, I invoked an ethic of care and compassion, whereby I adopted the goal to "honour, care for, and support" those interviewed (Ellis 2016, 431). An ethics of care approach placed the needs of, and benefits to, the research participants at the heart of the decision-making process. It also recognised the relationality and interdependency of the participants and the researcher (Held 2006; Wiles 2013).

Expanding equalities, fairness, and justice was central to the main focus of this research study. The experience of teachers from low-income socio-economic groups is an underreported topic. This research was conducted in a manner which was mindful of potential power imbalances and therefore showed sensitivity and respect to the personal contexts of the participants. Additionally, in considering my own

positioning as an insider, a number of measures were introduced to avoid imposing my own assumptions on the participants' experiences, as discussed in my positionality statement, section 1.5.

The participants' *autonomy* was safeguarded through the methodological framework which incorporated BNIM. The timing and location (face to face or through an online medium) was at the discretion of the participants. The open question at the outset of subsession 1 placed the power of sharing their story in the hands of the participants. They had control over the content and order of the story they told. In subsession 2, I probed rather than pushed for PINS which is viewed as problematic by Moran, Green, and Warwick (2022). Participants also had significant input into the presentation of their narratives in the thesis.

Appropriate measures to *minimise harm* were implemented in this research. Consideration was given to the possibility of discomfort or distress of the participants as they told their stories and deconstructed their experiences. I accepted the responsibility to suggest the participant seek additional supports if the need arose. I also committed to being responsive and to act appropriately in accordance with any unanticipated moral and ethical issues that arose.

In this narrative research a multitude of considerations for decisions to be conducted in an ethically appropriate manner opened up (Smythe and Murray 2000). My research response to these ethical decisions was guided by phronesis, reflexivity, and care (Kim 2015). Phronesis refers to my own informed ethical judgement, reflexivity

relates to my own reflections and to reflections of these reflections, and care of the multifaceted components of the research process.

3.7 Conclusion

The central research question in this study aims to shed light on the role modelling experiences of teachers from low-income socio-economic backgrounds. This chapter has presented the methodological framework and rationale for the approach which is situated in the interpretive paradigm. It also provided a discussion on the trustworthiness of the research and the ethical commitments considered.

The next chapter presents the first chapter of interpretations, the individual life stories of the six participants in the research. This chapter seeks to ensure the individual voice of the participant is heard. The second chapter of interpretations, chapter five, presents the similarities of the collective trajectories.

Chapter 4: Interpretations I – Participants' Individual Life Stories

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the individual stories of the six participants are presented. In keeping with the ontology and epistemology of the research, which is outlined in the previous chapter, the voices of the participants are central to the retelling of their stories. In the following vignettes, italicised font represents the spoken word of the participants, pseudonyms have been incorporated throughout.

The participants' life stories of becoming a teacher were shared with me over the course of three subsessions using the BNIM technique. During the first subsession, participants were prompted to answer the central research question with the single question to induce narrative (SQUIN): Will you please tell me the story of your life in relation to becoming a teacher, the events and the experiences that are important to you, you can begin wherever you like and I won't interrupt, but I might take notes if that's okay?. The two subsequent subsessions allowed for further probing and clarification in relation to their stories with the use of particular incident narratives (PINs). Frequently during subsessions two and three, the participants diverged off track as they recounted their narratives, prompting them to say, *Sorry, I went off on a tangent/rant there*, or *What was the question again?,* or similar. The subsessions took place either in-person or online, based on the participants' preference. Following the subsessions, the transcripts were analysed, and the text ordered chronologically to create the life story trajectories. Participants were invited to

review and share member reflections on the subsession transcripts and also on their life stories as presented in this chapter.

4.2 Meabh

> At the time of writing, Meabh is in her third year teaching in a rural DEIS school in the midlands. Her previous teaching experience includes two years teaching overseas and three years in an urban DEIS school in Leinster. Meabh comes from a large family, both parents are disabled. Meabh's primary motivation for being a teacher stems from her own personal background and her desire to want to help others*, "I suppose my life experience, growing up, the way my life was, I suppose, just made me realise that you wanted to help people, because you didn't want people to end up having to go through the struggles you went through."*

Meabh grew up in a small town in the east of Ireland with her six siblings and parents. Both parents were involved in accidents when she was young and have disabilities as a result. As a young child, Meabh helped her brothers, who have dyslexia, with their homework and spellings. Meabh recalls her mother saying, *"She'll be a teacher; I just know it."* One of Meabh's earliest memories of school is of being in class *"absolutely lost"* shortly after her father's accident and a teacher sitting with her telling her it would be ok. Meabh recollected that when she completed Primary school, the principal remarked on her resilience and how she kept *"mucking on"*

even when they tried to help. Looking back now, she comments *"they were always watching out for me, and I didn't realise."*

Meabh herself *"felt like an underdog in school"* who *"always had to work harder to get where I wanted to be".* When she was 16, she got a part-time job and *"there was times when I had to miss days in school because I needed the part-time job to pay for stuff like grinds or to help pay for my lunch some days or whatever."* Having a part-time job gave Meabh financial independence, this allowed her to purchase a car so that she could drive herself and a sibling to school, "*I was able to provide, to have the car myself. Mam and Dad didn't have to help me with it or anything so."* Meabh was "*glad*" to have a part-time job because she *"learned other skills through it as well, you learned to be resilient and work under pressure and stuff like that".* However, she acknowledged *"it was difficult at times when you see all your friends going out and stuff and you're like 'uh no, I've to work'. Or you're working over the summer, and everyone is going off doing this, that and the other, and you're like 'no, no, I've got to work'."*

Meabh assumes the teachers in the post-primary school she attended were aware of her family situation, she recalls that her teachers did offer support *"some of them would have popped in and out, just kind of gave you encouragement in different ways."* It was the guidance teacher in the school that first approached Meabh and her sibling about the possibility of applying for third level using the Higher

Education Access Route (HEAR[3]) scheme. Meabh's family were unaware of HEAR prior to this. Her older siblings, who attended a different school, did not know about the scheme. "*I remember like being small and there's seven kids there and my brothers trying to go to university and so on and they didn't know about Access. My brothers went to university, so it was all taking loans out of the credit union to help support my brothers in university*." Through the HEAR scheme Meabh was offered a place in an undergraduate teaching program, she would not have met the CAO entry points criteria without it.

During her time in university, Meabh was very involved with the Access programme and shared her knowledge of the scheme with others. Meabh worked with the Access group *"helping new people coming in"*, she could see the merits of the programme *"coming from my background I suppose, helping people settle into university. I always loved it, just helping out."* Meabh also encouraged some of her friends to apply to HEAR, advising them by saying *"you can apply for this as well, because you're from the same sort of cohort."*

Meabh made close friends within the Access group at University, but some members of the group were hesitant to let anyone know how they had met. *"If they* [friends from the Access group] *introduced me* [to other students from their course]*, they'd be like 'I just met Meabh our first day in college'. It was not that*

[3] The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is a college and university scheme that offers places on reduced points and extra college support to those who are resident in the Republic of Ireland and under-represented at Higher Education due to their socio-economic background. https://accesscollege.ie/hear/

'I met Meabh through Access'." Similarly, Meabh did not share that she was in Access unless she was asked, and then she was *"blunt and honest".* Meabh did not want to be treated differently because of her background *"I didn't want sympathy. I didn't want people saying poor Meabh, their poor family. I just wanted to be like, look, this is what you need to do, get it done and you'll be fine."*

In the initial weeks in University, Meabh noticed *"certain people did act in a certain way and were kind of sussing you out"* asking *"what does your Mam and Dad do, what's this, what's that, what's the other?"* Meabh said this behaviour *"wasn't a bit normal"*, and she quickly removed herself from those people, because *"I was like, these haven't a clue. They're just coming in, being like, this is what I've been told to do, they've not any sort of life experience. Not life experience, cause I wouldn't have had much either, but they probably never had a part-time job, they've never gone out and done certain things and because of that they act in a certain way."* Meabh was solely responsible for decisions she made about her course, she acknowledged a difference between herself and students that came from teachers' families. Some students were aware that selecting particular subjects would increase employment prospects. *"I was just like, whoah, they obviously had people behind them telling them 'do this, do that'. Whereas I didn't, I was going with, 'this is what I like'."*

Meabh continued to work part-time while she was at university. Often finishing college on a Friday and driving home, a journey which took two hours, to work a shift

on Friday evening. *"I came home every weekend, so I'd bring us all down to college. Full car going"*. She regularly worked for 20 hours over the weekend before driving back to University on Sunday nights. For a time, she tried staying in the University town at weekends, having found a part-time job there, but she only did this for a while. Meabh found it *"a lot different staying down there weekends. Nobody being there and you're working"* suggesting a very isolating experience. In contrast, travelling home meant *"you come home and your parents are there. They'd have dinner ready for you when you'd be working or whatever."*

Meabh was determined to do well in university and to make the most of the opportunity *"I know I need to do the job here now. When I get out of college, I need to be able to get a job and this is what I want to do, so any chance I got I was like, right go hell for leather at it."* Meabh graduated with a first-class honours degree, but she found it very difficult to get a job in Ireland. *"I'd sent out CVs all that summer and I did two interviews. The jobs were already gone, they told me, but I went for the interview for experience."* Meabh accepted a teaching position in the UK. However, shortly after starting in the UK, she received a call from a school, where she had worked on a summer programme with students from low-income backgrounds, offering her a position. Meabh accepted the position and returned to Ireland.

4.3 Neasa

> Neasa is in her seventh year teaching in a rural DEIS school in Leinster. Neasa is a former student of the school, having grown up in a small rural village within the catchment area of the school. Neasa always wanted to be a teacher and *"never wanted to do anything else"*. Her parents instilled their values of the importance of hard work and having a good education in her and her siblings.

Neasa is the youngest of four siblings. She grew up in a council estate in a small rural village in Leinster. Neasa's parents had placed a strong value on education, books were given as gifts and playtime activities were planned which involved writing and drawing. Neasa and her siblings *"were always kind of doing schoolwork as such, before we were even in school, so I suppose it was just kind of always something that I really wanted to do and enjoyed"*. Nessa remembers being at home with her mother, at a young age, while her older siblings were at school and questioning *"why are they all allowed to go to school and I'm not?"* Then, when she eventually started school, she disputed *"why do I have to go home at half twelve and everybody else gets to stay until three o'clock?"* Following an appeal to the principal of the Primary School, Neasa was allowed to remain until the end of the school day *"just pottering around, reading, doing whatever, school was a really positive experience".*

Neasa did not see herself as being different to her peers until her mid to late teens when a *"light bulb moment"* occurred and she realised *"oh right, not*

everybody had the same upbringing as me". A teacher in her post-primary school *"had gone on a rant"* at a student who was talking negatively about people from council estates. The teacher vented *"actually, I came from a council estate, and I went to college and I'm here and I'm doing this."* This incident caused Neasa to realise that *"oh yeah people do actually kind of look down their noses a little bit at us, and people do actually think that we're not going to amount to anything, or go anywhere, or do anything"*.

Growing up Neasa had friends from a mixture of backgrounds, some from the council estate and some from very wealthy backgrounds. As she grew older, she was *"maturing a little bit"* she started *"to become aware of how other people perceive you".* Neasa found it difficult to reconcile that some of her friends wanted to play in her estate but were forbidden by their parents. *"I kind of was like Jeez we're not diseased, we're not dirty like. Yeah, we were bold, we played knickknack, we were divils, but we weren't like bad. We weren't any different to the rest of the kids. Do you know what I mean? We just happened to live in a council estate."* This awareness did not deter Neasa from wanting to become a teacher, rather it provoked *"a kind of stubbornness in a way, kind of like, 'No, I'm going to do this'."*

Neasa's extended family did not have a history of going to third level. Neasa's mother and father both finished school prior to completion of state examinations. Neasa's father returned to education, when he was in his thirties, to complete his Leaving Certificate. Neasa has a large extended family, *"mam is one of fifteen and dad*

is one of ten, so you can imagine the amount of cousins". Neasa's brother was the first grandchild on her mother's side to go to third level and the rest of the siblings followed suit. Neasa reflects that *"because Mam didn't finish school and because Daddy went back and did it so much later in life, they really stressed how important it was to have an education".*

When Neasa started her undergraduate course in third level, her mother had been made redundant and her father had recently retired on disability grounds. Neasa did not qualify for a grant until she was in third year of college *"so there wasn't an awful lot of money coming in, but that didn't matter, we were going to find away and that was just it."* Neasa found the first four months of college *"quite hard",* she *"didn't really do the nightlife or anything like that"*. Financial pressures eased somewhat when she found a part-time job in the January of her first year in college, and eventually the grant became *"my saving grace as well"* but she *"didn't have that full on college experience that everybody else had"*.

Neasa *"didn't really enjoy college at all",* particularly when she progressed on to the PME. Neasa's Masters was partially paid for by a grant, *"I don't think I would have been able to afford it otherwise, or if I did, I would still have been paying it off."* During the first year of the Masters, Neasa worked in her local restaurant part-time and was *"making good enough money between wages and tips"* to pay for her diesel and the rest of the fees. Maintaining a healthy work life balance was difficult. *"I was literally in school* [on placement] *Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday; college Thursday till about 5 o'clock,*

come home shower, go to work; Friday, come home, shower, go to work; work all day Saturday, work all day Sunday." Having a social life was challenging as she either could not afford to go out, or she had to go to work. Neasa "*drifted*" away from the friends she had from her local area, their *"lives just kind of took different paths"*. Neasa was *"fed up at that stage"* and *"done with college"* and she considered if this was *"really what I want to do, or do I just want to go off and earn money?"* but she persevered and completed the course. Neasa's work ethic was instilled in her by her parents, *"you work hard, and if you want money, you have to work for it. If you want nice things, you have to work for them."*

After Neasa graduated, a job opening became available in her former school *"by chance"* due to the resignation of teacher with the same teaching subjects. The principal, who *"really liked having past pupils back on the staff"* contacted Neasa and encouraged her to apply for the role. Neasa was relieved because of *"nightmares about teachers hopping from school to school for years".* Neasa loves her job, because *"I love the school, I love the kids, I love the atmosphere and the culture".*

4.4 Aoife

> Aoife is in her fifth year teaching in a rural DEIS school in Leinster. Prior to this Aoife worked for one year in an urban DEIS school in Leinster. Aoife describes her mother's family as "*working class*", her father's parents were farmers. Aoife's mother and father were 16 and 17, respectively, when she was born. Aoife is the first member of her family to become a teacher.

Aoife is the eldest of three children and the eldest grandchild on both sides of her family. Her paternal grandparents were farmers and *"they were very education focused. They pushed for their kids to have a high standard of education".* Aoife's father is the only one of his siblings not to have gone to college. Aoife's father is *"a massive pusher for school in our household. And being employed himself now and owning his own company, he would never take on anyone who didn't have their Leaving Cert, he always thought that was very important and very valuable."*

Aoife's maternal grandparents were from a farming background, they saw the *"the natural progression from school"* was *"either you did your Leaving Cert and you went out and got a job, or you did your Junior Cert and you got a job".* Aoife's mother always wanted Aoife to *"see College and University as the next step after secondary school...because she never had that pushed for her, and as soon as she became pregnant at 15, it was totally off the table. She had to fight to finish her Leaving Cert".*

Aoife describes her family as *"an educationally driven community".* She believes that *"not going to college was never an option"*, it was a conscious decision of how her parents chose to parent. In particular, her father, "*never wanted it for himself, always wanted it for us".* Aoife enjoyed school; she remembers *"being so excited to go to primary school".* She enjoyed her time in class but *"didn't enjoy my time with the other students as much".* Aoife regarded some of the students *as "very clicky", "so that was different, that was difficult".* Her school had a mixture of people from different backgrounds, but some were *"a bit snotty about things",* she noticed *"a few parents didn't appreciate that my parents were so young"*.

Aoife' parents *"worked extraordinarily hard*" and specifically allocated child benefit supports *"purely to use for education",* such as educational trips and music lessons. Aoife recalls sitting down at the table with her parents discussing her academic progress and examining reasons for improvement, or decline, in her grades. *"Even though neither of them had done anything beyond the Leaving Cert, they were kind of coaching me into getting into college".*

As a young child, Aoife was greatly influenced by her uncle becoming an architect. *"I can remember distinctly deciding that I wanted to be an architect. At about six years old, and everybody was like, 'I want to be a singer'. I was like, 'I'm going to be an architectural engineer'*. Later on, at around the age of 15, while reading To Kill a Mockingbird in English class, she was inspired by Atticus Finch's father's profession, a lawyer, and she thought "*oh, my God, I want to do that instead*". Aoife did not consider teaching as a career until she was in

sixth year in post-primary school. Although Law was still her preferred option, when Aoife contemplated careers which incorporated her favourite subjects from school, *“the only job I could picture myself going with them was teaching.”*

When Aoife was in sixth year, she had the opportunity to *“step up in front of the class”* and teach her peers about one of the poets on their Leaving Cert English syllabus. She had received a scholarship to attend a poetry summer school the previous summer and her English teacher invited Aoife to teach the class about the poet. Aoife found it *“nerve wracking”* to prepare for the lesson, however *“it was a great experience, and everybody was lovely about it, there was no backlash. I was expecting to be mortified, but I wasn’t.”* Her classmates were attentive and supportive, and the teacher was very complimentary about the presentation which prompted Aoife to consider teaching as a career.

Aoife discussed her career choices with her parents. Aoife’s father’s preference was for her *“to be a teacher than a barrister, out of job security”.* He considered the route to being a barrister much more challenging and lacking in security. Aoife considered this advice but completed her CAO form with Law courses as her first options and then Arts courses. However, although Aoife achieved 440 points in her Leaving Cert, she was very disappointed not to receive any CAO offer.

Aoife attributes her failure to receive an offer of a college place to a lack of knowledge of the CAO system. *“Neither of my parents had ever done a CAO, they had no clue what the points system was.”* Aoife’s aunts and uncles had completed the CAO process for themselves years previously, but it was the older postal CAO

system, *"different systems, different codes"*. In addition to this, her school was *"in between career guidance teachers"* and there was *"no other kind of career guidance, or anywhere to go. I did not contact CAO at any point to ask them to help. I suppose I did not realise that those things were options"*. Aoife had applied for Law courses and Arts degrees with specific subjects, but *"the points ended up skyrocketing for those specified single honour courses"*. In hindsight, if she had selected a general Arts degree, she would have gotten in straight away, *"but we had no clue, I had no idea"*. Aoife celebrated her exam results with her friends and *"next morning I got up at 9 and I googled PLCs",* because *"it wasn't an option not to".*

Aoife did a legal studies and business management PLC for a year in Dublin City centre, commuting daily. Aoife found that she did not enjoy the legal aspects of the course but instead preferred the opportunities she had to deliver presentations to her class. Aoife applied to the CAO again and this time only applied for Arts courses with a view to teaching. Aoife was far more confident in applying the second time round, *"and in actual fact (I) only put down maybe three courses"*, knowing that the courses she applied for were well within the points she had achieved.

Aoife accepted a place in a University in Dublin, which entailed a four hour bus commute *"an awful lot of my time on the bus was spent reading the material I needed as much as I possibly could, because there was very little time other than that to get it done"*. Aoife had a part-time job to cover her expenses, and worked *"two late shifts a week, and the two weekend*

days" in a fast food chain, often until 2am. Working unsociable hours had a *"massive impact"* on her experience of college. She was unable to attend meetings for the different societies she joined, and she couldn't socialise with her friends. Aoife found her wages went *"very quickly"* and she could not *"actually really afford to go out very often anyway."* Aoife was not eligible for a grant as her father owned his own business at this point, she did apply because her *"parents had taken pay cuts, all this, that and the other with the recession"* but she did not meet the criteria. Although her parents helped her financially, *"at one point once all my bills were paid, I had like maybe ten euro a week to myself for coffee".*

Towards the end of her undergraduate course, Aoife stopped using public transport and drove to college. Aoife found herself in a *"vicious circle"* in relation to driving: *"If I didn't drive up, I couldn't make it back in time for my shift at work. And if I didn't make it to my shift at work, I didn't have petrol to drive up anyway."* Driving also reduced the time available to do college work, *"you can't study while you're driving, so that really took away from it as well".* Aoife continued to feel *"the pressure of both having to earn money and study as well"* during her PME, *"you would be in college three days a week, you'd be on placement two days a week and then you'd be working on the weekends".* Having to work part-time *"definitely had an impact"* on Aoife's attainment *"I definitely think if I'd had that pressure taken off me and if I'd had that time, I wouldn't have been as tired. And*

not being as tired would have given me far more opportunity to expand my readings in college".

Aoife's first year teaching position was a temporary leave contract in an urban DEIS school, the following year she secured her current position in a rural DEIS school. It is one of *"life's coincidences"* that she works in a DEIS school, but she reflects, *"I now prefer it, having done my teaching practice in voluntary schools. I wouldn't go back".*

4.5 Conor

> Conor is a Deputy Principal in a rural DEIS post-primary school in Leinster. Conor began his teaching career 15 years ago in a Further Education setting, he has subsequently taught in both rural and urban DEIS schools. Conor's decision to become a teacher was influenced by his Primary school Headmaster, his grandfather's value in education and *"that whole idea of having an impact, and the whole idea of being the change you want to be in your community"*.

Conor grew up in a small rural community in Leinster with his siblings, his parents, and grandfather. Conor has wanted to be a teacher for *"as long as I have thought about a career or what I would like to do in the future"*. Nobody from Conor's family, or extended family or immediate locality were from the teaching profession. The *"real influence"* for Conor's decision to become a teacher was the local Headmaster, a man who was *"the fabric of the local area".* The headmaster was *"old school",* he had *"formal ways of greeting people"* which he practiced with the students. Teaching them how to greet visitors to the school, or the local priest, and *"even how we interacted with one another"*. Conor *"really respected the impact he had in the local area"*, instilling *"that kind of love for your area, respect for people and actually love of education"* in them *"as youngsters".*

On one occasion, following a football match, Conor recalled one of his teammates making inappropriate comments to the opposing team. Even though *"lots of*

teachers might kind of pretended 'I didn't hear that'," the headmaster addressed the issue the following day with the whole group. It was then that Conor thought, *"God, I'd love to be a teacher in the future and even have half of the opportunity to have an impact positively on people's lives."*

Education was *"front and centre"* in Conor's household growing up. It was *"number one, far beyond even sport, even though sport is big in our house"*. Conor's Grandfather, who lived with them, had *"a big interest in education, even though he wasn't very educated himself. He just saw the power that education would have".* Conor's grandfather had a *"habit of rewarding us with chocolate or scratch cards"* if he or his siblings did well in their spellings; had a good report; or played well on the school team. He used to tell them *"The whole idea of education is power and if you want to change your circumstance, you know, really go for education".*

Growing up in the eighties and nineties in Ireland, Conor recalls *"there were no jobs in Ireland, there were no prospects for anyone"*. Conor's Grandfather *"made us watch the news all the time…You watched everything. You knew things weren't good in this country"*. Many of Conor's uncles and aunts emigrated to London and New York to find work, but they were *"unsettled"*, "*neither part of where they went, or where they came from"*, they were not happy and turned to alcohol *"to numb the pain of not being in Ireland".* Conor remembers *"always thinking, God, make sure that you can get a job and that you can work locally, and you can play for the local football*

team and stuff like that. So I always grew up with that fear of not being able to get a job".

Conor *"really always thought I'd like to be a teacher and that I could be a teacher", from "day one"* of secondary school, he knew the subjects that he wanted to teach. Conor selected the University for his undergraduate Arts course due to its proximity to home. For the first three months, he *"felt like a fish out of sea there",* he lived in digs 10km from the university which made it hard *"to settle in and make friends and connect with people"*. Conor also found it *"challenging"* to transition from *"learning from a book and someone handing you notes"* to having *"hours and hours of free time".* Conor began to spend a lot of time in the library because, *"I had to travel in and out and I knew I could only afford maybe to go in and out once a day and you wouldn't be wanted back in the digs until later on that evening."* This was a *"huge advantage*" as he *"actually started to utilise the library properly*" and "*started to do well*" and *"found then that I started to make connections with other people*".

The year after graduating from the undergraduate course, Conor did substitute work because he *"actually didn't realise you had to apply the previous year for the HDip".* He subbed predominantly in his former secondary school and also in two primary schools, sometimes he got *"a good run"* but then he might have no work for a time, he "*used to hate those lulls in between*". Conor then got a month of substitute work in a school in which he was mainly assigned to a challenging sixth year class group, Conor *"didn't understand their needs and there were lots of*

issues around discipline". Conor remembered thinking after that position that he would "*never want to be a teacher again,"* he decided to, *"forget about teaching, look for a job in private sector or somewhere".*

Conor applied for, and got, a job in a bank because *"people used to always say jobs in the bank were good jobs".* Conor *"enjoyed"* working in the bank but he "*didn't feel like I was going to ever fulfil any life ambitions*", he was still drawn to the "*whole idea of the impact you can have on people*". Approximately a year after he had worked in the challenging school position, he reconsidered his decision to be a teacher and thought "*sure why wouldn't I just go into teaching and give it a go?"* Conor initially applied to colleges and universities in the UK for both the primary and secondary PGCE. Following an unsuccessful interview for a place in the primary PGCE, Conor asked for feedback and was cautioned that having courses listed for both primary and post primary was ill-advised. The supervisor said, "*if you can't make your mind up on that, they're not going to risk investing a year in you".* Conor changed his application and subsequently was accepted to a University in the UK for the PGCE in post-primary education.

Conor really enjoyed the *"cut and thrust*" of the PGCE, he had profound respect for the course coordinator, he *"was great for me and really brought the teacher out of me".* Another "*big help*" to Conor was a teacher in the placement secondary school in the UK that Conor worked in during the PGCE, *"they worked really well together".* Conor observed this teacher teaching a number of times, and vice versa, Conor was akin to a "*good magpie*", "*you take little ideas or*

little things you see". On finishing the PCGE, Conor "*came back exceptionally confident for teaching*".

Conor was offered a job in the UK, but he wanted to come home and see could he teach in Ireland. Due to the global recession at the time, "*jobs in Ireland were exceptionally scarce, and the only place I could find that you could get jobs that time were Dublin*". Conor accepted a position as a "*resource person*" in a Further Education setting where he learned "*a huge amount*", the "*experiences there definitely made me a better teacher"*. Conor stayed in the role for eight years until a job in his subject area was advertised in a local rural DEIS school "*that had enough hours in them that would be worth my while moving for".* Conor has "*never looked back*" since.

4.6 Niamh

> Niamh has twenty years teaching experience in a DEIS school in Dublin. Niamh is a former pupil of the school. Niamh did not consider teaching as a career until the final year of her undergraduate degree. Niamh loves teaching and her school, she is known in the area as having "*committed*" her life to the school, "*blood sweat and tears*" have gone into it.

Niamh is the second youngest of ten children, her older siblings grew up in the 70s and 80s in Ireland when unemployment levels were high. Niamh is the first in her family to do the Leaving cert, "*even if they (siblings) got to Inter Cert, my older brothers and sisters would have worked, or done apprenticeships, or gone to England or America*". They left school to "*bring in to the household, that's just the way it was*". Niamh's parents having seen the older children emigrate for work, "*probably valued education a bit more*" when it came to the youngest four children, "*number seven, eight, nine, and ten*" as they call themselves.

Niamh's parents grew up in inner city Dublin in the 40's and 50's and "*never had an opportunity*". They married "*very young*", they lived in the outskirts of the city while the first six children were born, they then moved further away from the city centre to the city suburb where they live at present. Niamh considers her father to be the primary "*instigator*" of why she and her youngest sister went on to university, having witnessed the lack of opportunities and "*no room for progression*" for the older children. Some of Niamh's siblings refer to Niamh and

her youngest sibling as "*princesses*" because "*we did get a lot more opportunities, because we didn't have to go out to work, because we could stay in school".*

Growing up, Niamh "*absolutely loved school and loved learning*". "*Education was very important*" in the home, Niamh's Dad would "*always work around his job to be home to do the homework*" while Mam was busy with the kids. Dad would "*clear the table"* at night-time when Niamh was struggling with homework and "*we would work it out the pair of us*". Evening activities included watching Countdown and playing games, "*we thought we were playing cards, we thought we were playing darts, but we were actually doing maths at the same time*". A colleague of Niamh's has remarked that Niamh's father was teaching Project Maths[4] before anyone else taught Project Maths. Niamh recalls the "*constant encouragement*" she received like "*the card before the exams*" or "*the cup of tea when I wouldn't leave the room because I was so studious".*

Niamh's mother worked as the "*tea lady*" in the post-primary school that Niamh attended, she regularly came home and told Niamh about how teachers would say how good she was in school. There were a "*key few people at school*" that told her that she was "*very good*" and "*more studious*" compared to her siblings and this gave Niamh "*a bit of a boost*" and "*instilled*" confidence and a desire to do

[4] Project Maths was the first major change to the post-primary mathematics syllabus in Ireland since the 1960s. Phase 1 began in September 2010. www.projectmaths.ie

well. Having been placed in the middle stream for the Junior Cycle programme, Niamh "*went up the ranks then*" to the top two classes for the Leaving Certificate and put herself "*under an extreme amount of pressure*" to do well.

Following the Leaving Certificate, Niamh was offered a number of third level courses through the CAO. Niamh had also applied for a course in third level through an access programme. Sharing information about access programmes was done through whole school assemblies, a process which the school has continued. Information is "*opened up to everybody in our school to this day, we have a fantastic relationship with everybody in the Access Programme*". Niamh chose to accept the course through the access programme because logistically it was easier to travel to from home using public transport than the other options. Niamh worked part-time throughout the four years of college and her HDip year, as did most of her friends. Niamh's parents supported her financially, the extra cash was for "*the finer things*" like travelling and nights out.

During Niamh's time in the undergraduate course, she played camogie, a self-confessed "*GAA head*". Niamh had originally planned to work in a company "*like everybody else*" when she completed her course. As she approached the end of her final year, Niamh's friends, who "*were all going on to do Masters*" begged her to stay for another year. Niamh's attitude was "*I have my degree*" and *"I don't have the money for a Masters"*. One of Niamh's close friends suggested that she would be *"a brilliant teacher"* and she should *"do a thing called a HDip".* Niamh's parents got the money together for the HDip and she *"absolutely*

loved it, from the minute I went into the classroom, I was like, this is amazing. I just put my heart and soul into it."

Niamh completed the HDip in 2002, in the school she had attended at post-primary level. Niamh found the school principal to be "*very, very supportive*" of her, the principal encouraged Niamh to apply for a position in the school teaching her main subject and learning support. Niamh subsequently completed a learning support qualification on the recommendation of the principal. Initially, Niamh was apprehensive to be teaching in her former school, she questioned if she "*would be rated as a teacher*" because she went to school there. Niamh "*didn't want any favours either*", she did not want to be perceived as having been "*taken on because she's a past pupil*". Niamh "*doubted*" herself but "*it made me work harder, maybe it made me say - I'm going to prove a point to these boys and girls that I can teach just as well, if not better, than them*".

In addition to the qualification in learning support, Niamh has also completed the Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century Professional Development programme[5] (TL21) and a postgraduate diploma in leadership. She has done "*loads of voluntary stuff in the school*" organising trips and events, training teams, and advocating various access programmes and routes. Niamh has very good relationships with the students, they know she went to the school there. She treats them "*as equal*" and

[5] The TL21 Programme is a workshop based Continuing Professional Development programme for teachers and school leaders that promotes innovative pedagogic practice and professional learning communities in post-primary schools. https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/TL21

with "*total respect*" and she values the importance of having "*a good relationship with them and that they can trust you".*

4.7 Gráinne

> Gráinne has fifteen years teaching experience in a DEIS school in a Dublin suburb. Gráinne is a former pupil of the school and she also worked as an SNA in the school before becoming a teacher. Gráinne's *"whole experience of being from a socio disadvantaged background has made (her) more determined to become the best teacher (she) can be".*

Gráinne was *"born a teacher"* and "*would never do anything else"* but "*it wasn't the norm*" where she grew up in a disadvantaged suburb in Dublin. Growing up, Gráinne *"didn't realise I was growing up in an area that was disadvantaged*". Gráinne *"didn't know any teachers, only the teachers I had in school. I didn't know anybody that went on to go to teaching, it wasn't the profession where I was from*". Gráinne "*didn't have the easiest route*" and she "*did struggle to get into teaching*", but "*that's part of life and that's what makes life interesting*".

Gráinne's "*biggest role model*" is her dad. Gráinne's father left school at the age of 12 *"because they had no money in the family*", he went out to work "*like a lot of people did back then"*. Gráinne's father has *"a huge value on education*", he returned to education himself in his mid-forties and completed a BA in Finance in a Dublin University. Gráinne's father continued to work full time during the day, he attended lectures by night and had a young family at the time. The *"six years was hard work*", Gráinne remembers her mother saying to her and her

sibling *"shh, be quiet your Dad's studying"*, during his exam periods. Gráinne remembers attending her father's graduation and thinking "*I want to wear one of them*" in relation to the graduation gown. Gráinne has "*a picture of the two of us at his graduation, and then a picture of the two of us on my graduation*".

It was Gráinne's father that suggested she consider teaching as a career, saying she would *"be fantastic in teaching"*. However, Gráinne reflected that this would be challenging because, "*being from a socio-disadvantaged background, not many people from where I'm from go on to third level".* There was a high dropout rate in her school in senior cycle, a lot of girls left school to work full time because *"it was the attractive thing to do back in 2000"*. Gráinne asked if she could leave school also, but her parents said no. Gráinne recalled how her school had a "*brilliant incentive*" in sixth year whereby they were paid to go to school and *"to stop them from getting part time jobs"*. There was *"a huge emphasis on education"* in Gráinne's household growing up *"it was always – you went to school, did your homework, and you're going to university, and that's just it".*

Gráinne did not achieve the required points for her first-choice course, having missed it by five points, and she accepted her second choice instead. Gráinne describes herself as being "*young, quite immature and quite naïve*" starting in university. Her father drove her there on the first day and waited on her to bring her home at the end of the day. Gráinne did not qualify for any financial assistance in third level. Her parents "*worked for everything we had*" but they "*couldn't*

afford for me to go to college". Gráinne was "*made to get a part time job*" to assist with the associated costs of attending college, Gráinne stated that it was "*no harm*" and working gave her a "*bit of responsibility*" and "*a bit of independence*".

Six months into the undergraduate programme, Gráinne realised that she did not like the course, and she received advice from an academic advisor that she would have to pass her first-year exams to transfer to another course. Gráinne subsequently failed her first-year exams, however following the repeats she transferred to a different discipline. Gráinne graduated from the course at the age of twenty one with "*no idea what to do next*". Gráinne worked as a substitute teacher work for a few weeks and then accepted a position of a Special Needs Assistance (SNA) in the school that she herself went to. One of the reasons Gráinne decided to become an SNA was because she "*wanted to kind of get an insight into how students with special educational needs find their experiences at school*". Working as a SNA helped Gráinne decide "*yes, I really want to go into teaching".* Gráinne found it challenging to get a place on the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), she missed the points twice and was accepted on her third application.

On completion of the PGDE, *"it was the height of the recession, there was no jobs to be gotten in teaching*", Gráinne successfully applied for the position as the coordinator of a behavioural support classroom in the school. Gráinne describes getting the position in the school as *"a little by luck and probably by fate a little bit too"*, she is *"the only teacher in my school from our area".* At the age of 24, Gráinne felt she was "*so young and so inexperienced, but it*

was the best teaching experience I could ever have gotten". Gráinne "*wasn't really well accepted into a lot of the established staff at the time*", she considered this may have been due to "*being from a socio disadvantaged background myself, at the time it kind of went against me because I felt I wasn't taken seriously enough*". Gráinne initially "*felt a little bit intimidated*" and "*inferior*" and that she "*should sound the way some colleagues sound*", however, "*it took her a long time to realise you cannot lose your authentic self*". Gráinne believes having the same accent and background as the students has actually worked in her favour, "*because I am from the same area they're from, I can understand challenges they're faced with because they would have been some of the same challenges I faced with*". Gráinne coordinated the Behavioural Support classroom for six years before it closed. She then switched to teaching in the mainstream of the same school.

Gráinne hopes that teaching will become more diverse. "*You know like as it stands I'm the only teacher in my school from our area, I'd love to see as years go on, I'd love to see a wider range. I don't know will that happen, I don't know.*"

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the life stories of the six participants in this BNIM research. This chapter sought to present each narrative as a stand-alone account, as each story is a personal recollection of the participants' lived experiences. The accounts demonstrate the challenges encountered and overcome by each of the individuals.

Their career motivations and recollections of the people who influenced them on their journey to becoming teachers were also indicated.

The following chapter moves away from the individual perspective of the participants' narratives and turns towards recognition of their collective experiences to establish patterns and similarities in their life stories of becoming teachers. Further exploration will also be given to the impact of disclosure of their SEG backgrounds on their interactions with their students. Additional attention will be given to the role model experiences of the participants from the dual perspectives of being a role aspirant and their perceptions of being a role model. Their experiences will be situated within established literature in the field, where relevant.

Chapter Five: Interpretations II – Recognition of Collective Trajectories

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the individual autobiographical vignettes of the six participants in this research. This chapter moves to recognise collective trajectories and similarities in relation their personal stories of becoming a teacher, disclosing their SEG background, and role modelling experiences with the aim of responding to the central research question (CRQ):

> What do the life stories of post primary teachers from low-income SEGs tell us about the role modelling potential of this under-represented group in the teaching profession in Ireland?

The response to this overarching question will be considered under the four sub-questions which I originally outlined in chapter one. In section 5.2, I will consider: *What are the lived experiences of teachers from low-income SEGs in relation to becoming a teacher?* In section 5.3, I will discuss: *What kind of lived experiences have teachers from low-income SEGs in relation to disclosing their backgrounds?* In section 5.4, I will turn to: *What do participants' narratives reveal about their experiences of role models and role modelling behaviour?* Finally, in section 5.5, I will address: *What, if any, are the lived experiences of teachers from low-income SEGs in relation to being a role model for students in DEIS schools?* The themes for consideration, listed in table 5.1, have been identified from the participants'

narratives with respect to the CRQ. Each theme, which includes direct quotations from the participants to illustrate their lived experiences, will be situated in the context of established literature in the field.

Sub-question 1: What are the lived experiences of teachers from low-income SEGs in relation to becoming teachers?
Theme 1.1: Value placed on education within the participants' families
Theme 1.2: Career motivations of the participants
Theme 1.3: Navigating through the system – Overcoming
Theme 1.4: Beginning teaching – Support of the school principal
Theme 1.5: Belonging
Sub-question 2: What kind of lived experiences have teachers from low-income SEGs in relation to disclosing their backgrounds?
Theme 2.1: Amount of disclosure
Theme 2.2: Relevance of disclosure of background for pedagogical purposes
Theme 2.3: Valency of disclosure
Sub-question 3: What do the participants' narratives reveal about their experiences of role models and role modelling behaviour?
Theme 3.1: Inspirational role models
Theme 3.2: Behavioural role models
Theme 3.3: Representing the possible
Sub-question 4: What, if any, are the lived experiences of teachers from low-income SEGs in relation to being a role model for students in DEIS schools?
Theme 4.1: Self-perceptions of being a role model
Theme 4.2: Representational advocacy

Table 5.1 List of themes

Prior to the first meeting, all participants were sent information on the purpose of the research, this was verbally repeated at our first meeting. The aforementioned themes were developed from analysis of the participants' responses to the single

question to induce narrative (SQUIN) used in subsession one, which was: Will you please tell me the story of your life in relation to becoming a teacher, the events and the experiences that are important to you, you can begin wherever you like and I won't interrupt, but I might take notes if that's okay? Participants were prompted to expand on their responses in subsession two, by probing for particular incident narratives (PINS), and through the semi-structured interview format of subsession three.

5.2 Sub-question one: What are the lived experiences of teachers from low-income SEGs in relation to becoming a teacher?

The narratives, shared by the participants in this research, report the following in relation to becoming a teacher: the value of education was held in high regard within the participants' family homes, teachers from low-income SEGS were motivated to become teachers for altruistic and aspirational reasons, navigating the system presented challenges for first generational entrants into the teaching profession, participants' former principals acted as advocates and provided navigational support, and participants experienced a sense of not-belonging on their journeys to becoming teachers.

5.2.1 Theme 1.1: Value placed on education within the participants' families

Evident in the participants' narratives is the high value placed on education within their family homes as they were growing up. This value on education is likely attributed to their family's experiences of the educational system and the challenges some family members faced due to the economic climate of the time. The importance

of having an education in the backdrop of the economic climate of the 80's and 90's was referenced by some participants as there were family experiences of disenchantment and frustration caused by unemployment and emigration. Yosso's (2005) concept of aspirational capital is drawn on to inform the interpretations of this theme.

Four of the participants, Niamh, Gráinne, Neasa, and Aoife shared that their parents did not complete the Leaving Certificate themselves. The importance placed on having an education is further evidenced in the return to education later in life by three of the participants parents. Gráinne's father and Neasa's father both returned to education when their children were in Primary school. Neasa's father returned to complete his Leaving Certificate, Gráinne's father completed a part-time degree at third level while working full time. Aoife's mother enrolled in a third level degree programme shortly after Aoife completed her undergraduate degree.

Resounding through the narratives are the high expectations to have an education instilled in the participants by their families. "*There was never an option for me not to go onto college*" (Aoife, subsession 3). "*You went to school, did your homework, and you're going to University, and that's just it*". (Gráinne, subsession 2), and referring to her father's gown on his graduation day "*you'll wear many of these, you'll wear loads of these*" (subsession 3). "*If you get a good education, you'll have a good life, you'll get a good job, and you'll be able to live where you want to live*". (Conor, subsession 2) "*They really stressed how important it was to have an education*" (Neasa, subsession 2).

This high value placed on education was also manifested through the support and encouragement given by their parents or grandparents, routines were established for homework, games and play-time had an educational focus, exam results and goal setting were the focus of conversations, good results were rewarded. Neasa and her siblings "*were always kind of doing schoolwork as such before we were even in school*" (subsession 1). At Christmas she received books as presents and her mother always encouraged her to do activities at home which incorporated writing or drawing. Similar to Neasa, evening activities in Niamh's house had an educational focus, such as watching Countdown, playing darts, or playing cards. The importance of doing well was also a focal point for discussion and reward in some of the participants' households. Conor's grandfather would acknowledge good results in exams by rewarding Conor and his siblings with tokens and gifts. In Aoife's household, both parents spent time with her discussing exam results and her progress and "*kind of coaching me into getting to college*" (Aoife, subsession 1).

Some of the participants were actively encouraged to choose teaching as a career, as their parents had a high regard for the teaching profession. Aoife recollected her father's words: "*I'd actually love to see you as a teacher*". He highlighted his perceptions of the benefits of teaching, including "*pension and job security and you'll have your summers off*" (Aoife, subsession 3). Similarly, Gráinne's father encouraged her by saying "*you'd be fantastic in teaching*". Gráinne acknowledged "*obviously he knew me better than I knew myself at the time, he was right*" (subsession 3). Additionally, Meabh's mother also believed

that Meabh would become a teacher one day. While watching Meabh as a young child assisting her siblings with homework, she often remarked *"she'll be a teacher, I just know it"* (Meabh, subsession 1).

I have interpreted the parents' emphasis on the importance of the participants having an education in terms of Yosso's *aspirational capital*. The parents showed high ambitions towards education which allowed themselves and their children to dream of, and achieve, possibilities beyond their own circumstances (2005, 78). This is reflective of Gándara's (1982, 1995) research which indicated that Chicanas/os with low educational outcomes hold high aspirations for their children, thus breaking the cycle. In sharing their visions, hopes and dreams with their children, Aoife, Gráinne and Meabhs' parents reinforced the aspirational culture within the family homes. At their time of entry into teaching, teachers were accorded as having a high status (Conway et al. 2009) and the profession was generally regarded as well respected (Teaching Council 2010; Conway and Murphy 2013).

The participants in this research expressed their parents' desire to help them as much as possible with respect to their educational achievements, mirroring previous research in this area (Doyle and Keane 2019). Participants' parents took an active role in providing practical support in relation to schoolwork and homework which is comparable to the approach taken by middle-class parents with regard to involvement with homework (Fitzmaurice, Flynn and Hanafin 2020). The parents desired and supported their children, both emotionally and financially, to achieve educational goals greater than their own achievements. The support and encouragement demonstrated by parents could also be interpreted as the enactment

of Yosso's familial cultural wealth, wherein the families "model lessons of caring, coping and providing (educación)" (2005, 79). Educación refers to the dual meaning of education, it considers both formal education and moral education. Although the parents may not have had a formal education themselves, they had the capacity and resources to contribute positively to their children's success. This is consistent with Rondini's (2016) assertion that parents' low levels of educational and/or occupational achievement do not correlate with low educational aspirations for their children.

5.2.2 Theme 1.2: Career motivations of the participants

As detailed in their life-stories, Conor, Meabh, and Neasa each expressed a desire to become a teacher from a very young age, whereas Gráinne, Aoife, and Niamh decided to become a teacher in their late teens or early twenties. The theme of career motivations draws from two concepts previously explored in the literature review – altruistic motivation (Heinz, Keane, and Foley 2017; Burns 2018) and aspirational and familial capitals (Yosso 2005). The desire to help students, to make a difference, both academically and holistically was prominent. The importance of building relationships with students and their families was also notable.

The participants narratives clearly indicate a strong desire to have a positive impact on young people, not just in the classroom, but beyond it. This is evident in their expressions of why they chose teaching as a career:

"Being able to empower people to go on, build resilience, and become the best version of themselves they can be." (Conor, subsession 1)

To help the *"underdog"*, *"to be that one good person in the background, not even just teaching them* [subjects], *teaching them about life as well and what's going to happen next, and just being that support."* (Meabh, subsession 1)

"…we always do more than our job, we always do more than what's required… We're a nurse, we're a carer, we're a counsellor. We're everything. We're all these roles put into one place as a teacher… being from a socio disadvantaged background has made me more determined to become the best teacher I can be." (Gráinne, subsession 1)

Aoife, in her role as teacher, places an importance in building positive relationships with her students and creating a culture that is "*centred around community and bonding*". She is motivated "*to continue teaching*" because she feels "*like I've made a difference in quite a few students*" (subsession 1). Similarly, Niamh, who has put her "*heart and soul into"* teaching describes herself as having *"a whole family approach"* and being "*very proactive in a lot of areas of the school*", she has "*committed"* her life to her school and that "*blood, sweat and tears went into it*" (subsession 3).

The participants in this research all indicated altruistic reasons behind their career motivations of becoming a teacher. The themes of making a difference and being that one good adult resonated through their narratives. Their motivations could be categorised as 'making a worthwhile contribution to society' which was ranked as the fifth highest reason for choosing teaching as a career in Clarke's (2009) research on

PGDE students. The participants' social justice motivations are also in-line with more recent research which indicates the following: access route students are altruistically motivated in their selection of postgraduate courses and careers (Keane 2017), students from disadvantaged social backgrounds are significantly associated with motivational reasons of shaping the future and making a social contribution (Heinz, Keane, Foley and 2017), and the desire to make a difference (Burns 2018).

The altruistic motivations of the participants could be interpreted as an enactment of aspirational and familial capital for students like themselves. The participants were motivated to become teachers because they wanted to encourage their students to have high hopes and dreams and also because they have high expectations for their students. In being the one good adult, the participants are evoking a sense of familial capital. Familial capital also refers to a broad sense of kinship, not limited to blood relations, but inclusive of social settings, which fosters a commitment to community well-being (Yosso 2005). The participants have a community knowledge and unique understanding from their own experiences of being from a low-income SEG. They are motivated to use their cultural wealth and knowledge to be supportive of their students, particularly those like themselves.

5.2.3 Theme 1.3: Navigating through the system – Overcoming

This theme considers the difficulties encountered and overcome by some of the participants on their journeys to becoming teachers. The difficulties presented here relate to navigating the system. None of the participants had any family members who were teachers to provide inside knowledge, for some participants they were the first to complete the CAO or progress to third level. Navigating third level was

challenging due to financial constraints; Meabh, Aoife, Neasa, and Conor all experienced stress associated with balancing part-time work and full-time study. My interpretations related to this theme are informed by Tara Yosso's concept of community cultural wealth and the key barriers in entering ITE identified by Keane, Heinz and Lynch (2022) as discussed in the literature review.

Overcoming a lack of inside knowledge

All of the participants in this research were first generational with respect to becoming teachers. For some of the participants, they were the first in their families to sit the Leaving Certificate and engage with the CAO process. Their stories demonstrate the challenges and confusions associated with being first generational:

"To be honest, I didn't fully understand what the points system was and we had really bad career guidance…it just was not making sense for me". (Aoife, subsession 1)

"*I actually didn't realise you had to apply the previous year…for the HDip, so I went off and did a year subbing work"* (Conor, subsession 2)

"I did struggle to get into teaching. I didn't achieve the points in the leaving cert. I didn't get the points for [University name] first time around." (Gráinne, subsession 2)

Although the participants encountered difficulties, they did not give up. Aoife's recollection of that time suggests a sense of helplessness due to lack of knowledge, she had difficulty "*even understanding where to go to and what questions*

to ask" (subsession 2). However, when she learned she was unsuccessful in getting an offer through CAO, she responded by researching Post Leaving Certificate courses because "*it wasn't an option not to".* During the time that Conor spent subbing, a negative experience with a challenging post subsequently influenced his career goals and he opted to work in a bank instead. After a year working in banking and feeling dissatisfied, he reconsidered and reapplied for teacher education courses in the UK. Gráinne's first setback of missing her desired course by five points was subsequently followed up with the additional setback of failing her first year exams in the course she *"absolutely hated"* (subsession 2). Gráinne met with an academic adviser to seek advice on how to navigate the system and ultimately transfer to a course which was preferential.

The setbacks experienced by the participants in navigating the system of entry into the teaching profession could be attributed to insufficient insider knowledge. Recently Smyth (2022), from the Growing Up in Ireland study, has that found that there is a disparity between career decision-making processes with respect to social class. Smyth's research indicates that students from working-class backgrounds are less reliant on their parents for advice as the parents may not have insider knowledge of the education system. Students in this cohort often rely on school-based sources of information which can be insufficient. Having a teacher within the family circle has a significant impact on the likelihood of consideration of teaching as a career (Drudy et al. 2005) and could also provide the opportunity for institutional knowledge. However, none of the applicants had a teacher in their immediate families, or their wider circle of families and friends.

The participants' decisions to become teachers challenged societal norms. I have interpreted their decision to join the teaching profession, a profession traditionally dominated by the middle-class, as evidence of their resistant capital (Yosso 2005). Resistant capital acknowledges the skills and knowledge developed through oppositional behaviour which challenges inequality. Having parental support and the opportunity to attend further education could warrant the participants being described as "the most advantaged of the disadvantaged" and therefore more likely to challenge institutional rules (Clemens 1997, 12). The ability of the participants to overcome adversity and successfully gain entry and graduate from their respective teacher education programmes is further evident of their high level of navigational cultural wealth. Even though they didn't have insider knowledge they developed their own knowledge of systems and found support networks to enable them to navigate unfamiliar territory. Additionally, the aspirational capital instilled in them by their families encouraged them to not give up at the first hurdle. Community cultural wealth in this context may provide an alternative, more nuanced, understanding of scholastic achievement in lieu of Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of capital.

Overcoming financial limitations and implications

All of the participants spoke of the necessity of working part-time while they attended third level due to financial constraints:

"I was made to get a part time job now, that was the only thing. I had to work. My parents couldn't afford for me to go to College." (Gráinne, subsession 2)

“In 1st and 2nd year I worked in the [Hotel name]. And then in 3rd and 4th year and the HDip I worked in [Company name] at nighttime. So, I always worked in college.” (Niamh, subsession 3)

For some of the participants, working part-time led to exhaustive schedules:

“So I’d be leaving college on a Friday and straight into work Friday evening, work all day Saturday, working til 6 or 7 on Sunday and driving straight back down to college.” (Meabh, subsession 2)

“Like, there were times when I would be working seven days a week for twelve weeks at a time…especially in the PME, you would be in college three days a week, you'd be on placement two days a week and then you'd be working on the weekends…So for most of my undergrad, I would have been in college Monday to Friday, and I worked Thursday night, Friday night, Saturday, Sunday.” (Aoife, subsession 3)

“And even when I was on placement doing my Masters, I was literally in school Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday; college Thursday til about 5 o’clock, come home, shower, go to work, come home, shower; go to work all day Saturday; work all day Sunday.” (Neasa, subsession 1)

The participant’s work schedules were a necessity to support themselves financially, as Neasa articulated: *“the grant isn’t enough if you’re not working, it’s not enough…not if you are paying rent, food, it’s supposed to cover your college books, everything, and it’s not enough”* (subsession 2). Unsurprisingly, their schedules compromised their work-life balance. Aoife, Neasa

and Meabh all shared that they a limited social life in college, as they either could not afford to go out, or they were working unsociable hours. Additionally Aoife, who often did not finish work until 2am, believes working part-time interfered with her ability to do her coursework and be prepared for lectures "*it definitely had an impact on what I attained*" (subsession 3).

The stress associated with juggling lectures, teaching placements and part-time work is consistent with findings previously reported in Keane, Heinz and Lynch's (2022) research on the factors impacting the retention of students from under-represented groups in initial teacher education. However, in their recollections, the participants were not seeking sympathy or praise in their experiences. Meabh's attitude was to "*get on with it*" (subsession 2) no matter what obstacle presented itself. Aoife kept going because there was no alternative, there "*wasn't an option*" (subsession 1) to give up. Similarly, Neasa's philosophy in relation to financial difficulties was they "*were going to find a way and that was just it*", she is somewhat pragmatic about her college experiences, saying "*that was just what I had to do, d'you know"* (subsession 1). The participants shared a resoluteness that is admirable, but they did not seek admiration.

The participants experienced challenges typically associated with having diminished quantities of Bourdieusian forms of capital. Limited access to economic capital prevented opportunities to socialise and created a stressful work-life balance. Lack of insider information and inadequate cultural and social capital made it more difficult for the participants to gain entry into teacher education programmes. However, their achievements and resilience in manoeuvring through the system,

which seemed stacked against them, indicates a high level of navigational cultural wealth. Resilience is a core element of Yosso's navigational capital. I concur with Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) conceptualisation of resilience. Stanton-Salazar and Spina challenge the traditional construct of resilience which can romanticise adversity and imply a position of judgement; neither do they equate resilience with optimism, happiness or unrealistic hope. Drawing on Spina's (1998) description of resilience, they see it as the optimal response to stress which can apply to "the pleasant and unpleasant, the momentous and mundane, the extraordinary and the simple" (Stanton-Salazar and Spina 2000, 230). The optimal response is situational and subjective, the most suitable response may not be the most appropriate response in another context or with another person. They also posit that the optimal response is not without cost, the individual may decide to tolerate a stressful situation in order to avoid a more stressful one. The participants' resilience was also enhanced by their familial cultural wealth which their families provided through their support, encouragement, and their capacity to instil self-belief.

5.2.4 Theme 1.4: Beginning teaching – Support of the school principal

The focus of this theme is to present the experiences of the participants with respect to teaching in their former post-primary schools. Evident in their experiences is the supportive role played by the principals of their former schools. To delve further into this theme, I draw on Yosso's (2005) construct of social capital to interpret the allegiance demonstrated by the participants' former principals. Social capital, as a form of community cultural wealth, recognises that social contacts and networks of

people can provide influential guidance and emotional support to navigate society's institutions.

Three of the six participants, Niamh, Gráinne, and Neasa are currently teaching in the schools they themselves attended for their post-primary education. In the cases of Niamh and Gráinne, it was their first teaching position post qualification and they have remained teaching in the same school for their teaching careers thus far, 20 years and 15 years respectively. Neasa's first teaching post was in the school within which she completed a placement for her PME in the previous year. She worked there for a few weeks until she received a call from the principal, from the school she herself attended, informing her of a job opportunity. Neasa is now in her seventh year teaching in that school.

Niamh acknowledged the role the school principal had in encouraging her to apply for a teaching position in the school when she qualified. Niamh did not get the position, it was "*one of those jobs, you know, one of those interviews you go for and the job is already gone*" (subsession 3). The principal advised her to "*hang in there*" and she gave her some hours in a learning support role. Niamh was successful in getting the next position that arose. Neasa described working in her former school as happening "*kind of just by chance*". The "*brilliant*" former principal of the school "*loved having past pupils on the staff*" (subsession 2), Neasa also named three additional colleagues who were former pupils. Neasa's former principal rang her to let her know a position was coming up and told her to "*just make sure that you go on and apply*". Similar to Neasa, Gráinne "*didn't intend to work there*" in relation to working in her former school, it was "*a little*

by luck and probably by fate a little bit too" (subsession 2). She was initially appointed as an SNA in for former school for 18 months prior to enrolling in the PDGE. Following her qualification she applied for the post of coordinator of the behaviour support classroom within the school, a position she did for six years. With support from the principal, Gráinne then requalified as a maths teacher and did additional training to be a qualified Special Education Needs (SEN) teacher.

Of the remaining participants, Aoife and Conor both gained work experience in the schools they attended prior to enrolling in their initial teacher education courses. Conor's former post-primary school principal facilitated a substitution placement in his former school, even though he "*hadn't done teacher training and stuff like that*" (subsession 2). During Aoife's final semester of her undergraduate program, she asked her former principal if she could "*come in and shadow"* (subsession 1) some of the staff. It was not long before she was "*helping out with supervision and everything*". Aoife returned to the school for one of her practicum placements.

The opportunity to work in their former schools, and the support received from their former principals, came with negative consequences for some of the participants:

"I wasn't really well accepted into a lot of the established staff at the time... being from a socio disadvantaged background myself, at the time it kind of went against me because I felt I wasn't taken seriously enough" (Gráinne, subsession 1) *"I think because I was a past pupil as well*

of the school it didn't help and at the start it made me feel a little bit inferior. I kind of felt a little bit intimidated" (Gráinne, subsession 2)

"I didn't like it. I think to myself, 'oh, God, are you going to be rated as a teacher because you went to school there'… I didn't want any favours either. I wanted to make my own way. I didn't want to get a post because I was a past pupil because it was a bit of a joke, that about, oh, she's taken on because she's a past pupil kind of thing... I didn't like the fact, but maybe it made me work harder. Maybe it made me say, 'oh, I'm going to prove a point to these boys and girls that I can teach just as well, if not better than them'. And then when I became an A post holder[6] alongside them, y'know, I was able to hold my own." (Niamh, subsession 2)

Gráinne and Niamh both started their teaching careers believing that their teacher credibility was questioned by their colleagues. Although it was never stated directly, Niamh felt that her colleagues viewed her unfavourably and questioned why she was hired. Niamh responded by working additionally hard to demonstrate that she was hired based on her own merits. Similarly, Gráinne felt she had to prove herself. Her feelings of inferiority were compounded by the attitude of some of the established staff who did not accept her and take her seriously. There was a strong sense from these participants that success at interview was not sufficient to prove they were

[6] A posts are posts of responsibility within Irish schools. Formerly known as Assistant Principal post (A post) and Special Duties post (B post). These roles are currently referred to as Assistant Principal 1 (AP1) and Assistant Principal II (AP2).

worthy of their posts, they also had to endure the scrutiny of their former teachers turned colleagues.

The participants' former post-primary school principals could be viewed as allies in supporting the participants' journeys to becoming a teacher. They provided a valuable source of the social capital aspect of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) by acting as gatekeepers and providing the necessary connections to begin the participants' teaching careers. The social capital afforded to the participants is of considerable importance as some students report difficulties in finding school placements and appropriate teaching experience (O'Brien 2018; Cannon 2004).

There is a lack of Irish research on the hiring practices of post-primary principals. Research in the Canadian context found that principals were in favour of hiring teachers who represent and understand the community wherein they work, but diversity would not outweigh the teachers' competency and skill set (Jack and Ryan 2015). It is plausible that the principals connected to this research were also motivated to hire representative teachers, but this warrants further investigation.

5.2.5 Theme 1.5: Belonging

Interspersed throughout the participants' narratives are their recollections of not belonging as they traversed class boundaries, either in their time in third level, or early on in their careers. Conor and Meabh recounted feeling out of place when they transitioned to third level. Whereas Neasa and Niamh shared her experiences of being alienated by her former school friends and/or family members because they had the opportunity to attend third level. Niamh and Gráinne both encountered

feelings of not belonging when they began their teaching careers. The theme of belonging considers the concepts of habitus as described by Crew (2020) and corroborates the findings with respect to feelings of alienation (Maguire 2005a; Burn 2001) and the adoption of class matching mannerisms (Keane 2023a; Jones 2019) as previously discussed in the literature review.

Conor recounted the "*big struggle*" to settle in and connect with other students in the first few months at university, feeling like "*a fish out of sea there*". He found it challenging to make friends with his classmates, who he perceived to be *"so much more kind of street wise than me"* (subsession 2). The geographical distance between his accommodation and the campus and financial limitations in relation to travel expenses further exacerbated his isolation. Meabh also struggled to connect with some student cohorts in third level. She believed some of her fellow students were judging others and "*kind of sussing you out*" based on their over-inquisitiveness in relation to parents' careers. Meabh responded by "*very quickly*" deciding to *"remove*" herself from that and distanced herself from those groups. Although she was friendly with people in the Access group, she was reluctant to share personal information with some students for fear of their judgement. This form of distancing has been reported by Keane (2011), who suggests it is a means of self-protection utilised by working-class students, to reject others before they reject you.

During the period in which Neasa progressed through her undergraduate programme, she drifted away from her old friends in her housing estate. This was due, in part, to Neasa having less time for socialisation and their lives taking different paths. Neasa believes her old friends no longer wanted to associate with her; her

progression to third level had created a gulf between them: *"they think that I think that I'm above them now because I go to college"* (subsession 1). If she passes them on the street now *"they'll just put their heads down, so they don't have to say hello to me"*. In a similar manner, Niamh's progression to university created a wedge between herself and her siblings and some former classmates from post-primary school. She described being alienated and mocked derisively by her older siblings. Niamh and her younger sister were the only two out of the ten children in her family that had the opportunity to stay in school and do the Leaving Cert. *"There is a chip on the shoulder of some of my brother and sisters to this day, about me and [Sister's name], me and my little sister, they have chips on their shoulders to this day…They call us the princesses"* (Niamh, subsession 2). Although she has retained some friendships from school, some former classmates had made "*snide comments*" about her desire to go to "*oooh [University name]!"*. These experiences are consistent with those of Liz (Maguire 2005a) and Jenny (Burn 2001) who were both cut off from old friends as a result of attending third level.

As discussed in the previous section, 5.2.4, Niamh and Gráinne both expressed feelings of insecurity on crossing social class boundaries and returning to work as teachers in their former post-primary schools. They both struggled with being accepted by their former teachers and they were both conscious that their strong local accents marked them as different to their colleagues. Niamh stated that she no longer has a strong local accent, which suggests she has assimilated to the predominant dialect of her colleagues to 'fit-in'. However, Niamh admitted *"I can*

turn it on when I want to" (subsession 3), which suggests she deliberately alters her accent to suit the situation and target audience. Gráinne also acknowledged that she initially tried to mask her accent to fit in and be accepted by her colleagues: *"what appeared to me was middle class, well off, very well spoken. I didn't sound like them. I didn't have the vocab they have. I still don't. But now I don't try to, because, I'm like, this is who I am, and this is my authentic self"*. (Gráinne, subsession 2)

The class matching mannerisms presented by Niamh and Gráinne coincide with those reported in previous research (Jones 2019; Lampert et al. 2016; Maguire 2005a, 2005b). Niamh's class-matching behaviours are comparable to Keane's (2023a) concept of class chameleoning, which she ascribed to the way in which student teachers from working-class backgrounds either deliberately or unconsciously imitated the speech patterns of those around them. Gráinne, who originally tried to mask her accent, which is an identifier of her background, is almost defiant and confident in retaining her authentic self. Gráinne uses her accent to her advantage, as a form of linguistic capital, this will be discussed separately in the theme of representational advocacy, section 5.5.2.

The participants' feelings and experiences in relation to not belonging could be considered as the fallout of their former habitus not aligning with their new situations and contexts. Crew (2020) in her research on working-class academics considered the role of habitus on reconciling identity and class migration which resonates with the participants' experiences in this study. Firstly, habitus clivé, Bourdieu (2004), or cleft habitus, describes a fragmented or divided habitus which occurs as a result of

conflicting social influences and contexts. It can be a byproduct of social mobility and may lead to isolation from both former and current class positions (Friedman 2016). Secondly, an abandoned habitus (Ingram 2018) occurs when the primary habitus is left behind and the individual begins to 'pass' as middle-class. The third form of habitus realignment, noted by Crew, is a chameleon habitus (Abrahams and Ingram 2015), wherein her respondents did not eradicate their former habitus but adopted different personas depending on the situation.

The experiences and feelings exhibited by the participants in this research could be attributed to their conflicted and renegotiated habitus. Their experiences also bear the hallmarks of hidden injuries of class (Sennett and Cobb 1972) which include: feelings of inferiority and social exclusion due to social status; feeling culturally and socially alienated due to financial constraints; and the adoption of attitudes and behaviours to fit expectations of others. Rondini (2016) suggests that these hidden injuries can be healed by the aspirational proxies held by low-income students and their families. She conjects that although the parents in her research did not directly yield gains themselves commensurate with their efforts, they aspired that the next generation, their children, would reap the rewards. However, the participants hidden injuries or conflicted habitus did not prevent them from realising their career intentions of becoming teachers. A possible explanation for this may be their acquired wealth of aspirational capital, which is the "ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality" (Yosso 2005, 77). Their ability to assess a situation and distance themselves from it as a means of self-preservation could be interpreted as a form of navigational capital. Similarly, the ability to acquire class-matching

behaviours in order to be accepted as they migrated class boundaries could also be attributed to their community cultural wealth. The participants acquired the requisite skills and knowledge to navigate and assimilate into their new surroundings, or more crudely, they learned to 'fake it until you make it.'

5.3 Sub-question two: What kind of lived experiences have teachers from low-income SEGs in relation to disclosing their backgrounds?

In this section, I present my interpretations regarding the lived experiences of the participants in relation to disclosing their backgrounds to their students and or colleagues. Disclosure in this research refers to the sharing of their socio-economic status or working-class backgrounds. All six participants spoke of their SEG status during the first subsession in response to the SQUIN. In order to prompt participants to further share their experiences of disclosure in sub-session two, particular incident narratives (PINS) were used. A sample PIN used in conversation with Gráinne was *"And tell me, when you were saying there, about the students, that they know you're from a similar background, is it because they know where you live or is it because you told them?".* If the opportunity for a PIN did not arise in sub-session two, the participants were asked directly in sub-session three. For example, Meabh was asked: *"And in relation to disclosing your background, which you've done with some of the students in [School name], how did that come about?*

The participants' experiences of disclosure will be presented using the three aspects outlined by Cayanus and Martin (2008) namely: *amount, relevance, and valence*. The first theme, *Amount of disclosure*, 5.3.1, will consider the occurrences of disclosure

by the participants. This includes the collective experiences of Gráinne, Niamh, and Neasa, of unavoidable disclosure of their backgrounds. These three participants are former students of the post-primary schools in which they now work. Gráinne, Niamh, and Neasa continue to live in the same area, as such, their SEG status is known to some and does not have to be declared to the same extent as the remaining participants. Meabh's varied experiences of disclosing her background throughout her time in school as a student and as a teacher will be presented. And finally, in this section, Conor's non-disclosure of his background will also be detailed.

The second theme, *Relevance of disclosure*, 5.3.2, presents disclosure for pedagogical influences. This section will consider the manner in which Aoife discloses her background to encourage critical thinking and reflection in her students. Her subject area enables students to share their personal experiences through writing, Aoife expresses her personal experiences to encourage her students to reciprocate in their writing. The third theme, *Valence of disclosure*, 5.3.3, will consider the positive and negative effects of disclosure experienced by the participants. Meabh, Gráinne and Niamh use their own lived experiences to connect with their students and as a source of motivation and encouragement. Additionally, Meabh uses her role as coach to develop relationships with students and mentor them in relation to considering third level options after school.

5.3.1 Theme 2.1: Amount of disclosure

This theme considers the amount or frequency of disclosure by the participants and also considers the factors which influenced their decisions to disclose, or not disclose, their low-income SEG status with their students. The positive aspects (Farber 2006)

and negative consequences (Kowalski 1999) of self-disclosure, as outlined in the literature review, are drawn on to form interpretations for this theme.

Gráinne, Niamh, and Neasa are all teaching in the schools they attended for their post-primary education. Their families are well known in their localities. As such, their low-income SEG background is disclosed to some of their colleagues and students without them having to overtly divulge it. Each of the three participants are proud to be working in the same school that they went to. Both Gráinne and Niamh say they are easily recognised in their communities as being from the area, they are well established teachers, having taught for fifteen and twenty years respectively. They both use their experiences to encourage students from the urban DEIS schools they work in, which have a high proportion of students from low-income SEGs. Neasa is also known to live in a council estate in a town within the catchment area of the rural DEIS school she works in. Neasa's school has a low proportion of students from low-income backgrounds.

Gráinne's family is well known in the urban community in which her school is situated, her father is a board member of a local financial institute, and her mother works as home help in the area. Over twenty years has passed since Gráinne was a student in the school, many of her former teachers have retired. However, her present colleagues and students are aware that she was a former student of the school. If her background was queried, she "*would openly tell them*" and she added "*I say my accent gives it away as well. When I meet students, like say in first year, they would straight away hear my accent and they would ask me you know.*" (Gráinne, subsession 3). Gráinne continues to have

strong connections within the community, she lives in the local area in close proximity to her childhood home and school.

Niamh's family is also well known in the area in which she works. Niamh's mother was the tea lady in the school and has only recently retired. Niamh's students know she went to the school, even though she left as a student over twenty five years previous, "*there's pictures of me up around the place*". She is confident in sharing her background, saying "*it wouldn't bother me now, telling them"* (subsession 3). Niamh has often met her students while out with her own family and she uses these opportunities to further connect with the students. She talks "*to them like they're normal people*" and treats them equally and with respect, letting them know things like her family members' names and events she has attended, unlike some of her colleagues.

Neasa, who is in her seventh year teaching still lives with her parents in the council estate she grew up in in rural Leinster. Some of Neasa's students "*now live in the same estate as me*" so everyone would know that is where she is from, Neasa describes the estate as "*very close knit*". Neasa has talked to students about growing up in the estate and the games she played as a child. Neasa has used her knowledge of the estate and where pupils live to encourage students to ask each other for help. However, she has never "*actually had to have that conversation with anybody*" in relation to believing you can "*make something of yourself*" because of their background, or the "*stigma around it*". It has "*never come up in a kind of like a serious conversation as such"* (subsession 3).

Meabh's perspective on disclosing her background has changed over the course of her own education and her career thus far. When she was in post-primary school, she "*never showed it*" nor discussed with teachers or her friends. Meabh "*hid it in a way*" and "*just got on with life*" (subsession 2). As Meabh progressed to third level, very few people on her course knew she had accepted her place through the HEAR access route. If Meabh was asked directly about her background, she was "*very blunt and very honest*", but she deliberately did not disclose because she *"didn't want sympathy".*

Meabh's first teaching position was in an urban DEIS setting, this school had a high volume of students from low-income backgrounds. Meabh would disclose her own SEG background "*very easily*", saying "*I'm from a family of seven and both my parents were in car accidents"* in order to let her students know "*that there were options*" (subsession 3). Meabh has not disclosed her background as frequently in her current school, which is in a rural DEIS setting. Meabh attributes this to a difference in culture in this school. Having joined the school staff during Covid-19 pandemic restrictions[7], she has not had the opportunity yet to get to know the students in the same way as she did in her previous school. Meabh also noted that due to the higher number of low-income students in the urban DEIS school, there was a stronger whole school approach to supporting students to consider career options.

[7] Public health measures during the COVID-19 pandemic included school closures and protective measures such as social distancing and wearing of face masks.

Aoife discloses her background and personal experiences to her students when relevant to the teaching curriculum in her subject area. This will be discussed in theme 2.2, Relevance of disclosure of background for pedagogical purposes.

Conor is the only participant of the six that consciously decided not to disclose his background to the students he works with because "*it's rule number one when you're coaching and mentoring – don't start talking about your own experiences*". Conor's primary reasoning for not disclosing is due to the greater opportunities available to students now, compared to when he finished school twenty years previously. Conor's perspective is that "*the world is completely different now*" to the world that he grew up in. The "*whole idea of 'you have one chance of this'*" is obsolete in today's world because there are "*far more possibilities"* (subsession 3),

Gráinne, Niamh, and Neasa were known in their local communities, as such disclosure of their background was generally known by default. They spoke confidently about sharing the details of their background with students and colleagues who may not otherwise have known. It is plausible that disclosing their backgrounds was made easier as they benefitted by being 'one of them'. For each of these three participants, their parents and families were known and respected within the local communities, which potentially influenced their confidence in disclosing their background and speaking of their experiences. The community cultural wealth acquired from growing up in the local community has enabled Gráinne and Niamh, in particular, to draw on their shared history to connect and relate to their students. By sharing their

experiences, they increased the opportunity for positive aspects of self-disclosure, such as emotional closeness and authenticity (Farber 2006).

Meabh, similar to Gráinne and Niamh, disclosed her SEG status to her students to connect with them. Her circumstances were different to Gráinne, Niamh, and Neasa, in that she was not known in the local area. Her disclosures may have been more challenging on a personal level as there was a greater risk of negative consequences of self-disclosure, such as increased vulnerability, risk of rejection, and creating undesired impressions (Kowalski 1999). Meabh had taught in two schools with DEIS status. Her first school was an urban school with high population of students from low-income communities. Although Meabh was not from the same community as the students in her first teaching post, she could identify with them. In her second school, which is a rural DEIS school, she has not had the same opportunities for disclosure. Meabh attributes this to the different needs and dynamic of the student body and also because of the barriers of social distancing and mask wearing due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Gráinne, Niamh, and Meabh predominantly used self-disclosure for the relational dimension of teaching and developing teacher-student relationships (Zhang et al. 2009). By sharing their lived experiences with their students, they shared their familial and social cultural wealth. The difference in each of the participants' decisions in relation to disclosure could be attributed to personal choice. However, the influence of length of teaching career and status within the school and the demographic of the student body cannot be discounted and are worthy of further research and exploration.

5.3.2 Theme 2.2: Relevance of disclosure of background for pedagogical purposes

Theme 2.2 considers the pedagogical relevance of self-disclosure which is utilised by Aoife. Aoife's motivation for disclosure of her lived experiences is primarily to develop reflective and critical thinking skills in her students. Aoife considers the sharing of her own personal experiences to be intrinsic to the teaching of her subject and she discloses personal information where relevant to the curriculum. Yosso's concept of resistant capital is used in this context to interpret Aoife's disclosures.

Aoife confidently discusses her life story with her students: *"I don't shy away from bringing my own experiences into the classroom"* (subsession 3). Aoife frequently discloses her parents being "*so young*" when she was born because the topic is relevant to some of the texts in the senior cycle course. She will "*happily tell the students the impact [events] had on me*" because "*if they haven't seen someone be reflective and think in a critical way, it's very difficult for them to do*". Aoife places merit in having open conversations and bringing "*your personal side into it*", she sees the impact when she views the students' personal essays, as the students "*are spilling their hearts and souls out to me as well*" (subsession 3). The practice of sharing to develop empathy is one she has adopted from one of her own former teachers.

Aoife would "*be totally honest*" when her fifth and sixth year students asked about her college experiences. She "*definitely did tell them it was difficult at times*" but she "*didn't talk about the financial issues as much*". Her personal experiences of her parents being aged 16 and 17 when she was born has

taken precedence in her conversations with students, moreover than her low-income SEG status.

Aoife's motivation for self-disclosure was to help her students develop critical reflective thinking skills. Aoife's purposeful self-disclosure somewhat mirrors the experiences of Talbot in Conrad (2020), who used his gay/queer identity a potential teaching asset to enhance students' critical empathic reasoning. Self-disclosure in this respect requires and fosters the development of a safe space. Aoife required a safe space to expose her own vulnerabilities, trusting her students with her disclosure helped to cultivate the safe space. Through modelling mutual trust and reciprocity, Aoife's students were empowered to engage in more meaningful classroom dialogue.

Aoife also demonstrates her resistance capital in disclosing her background to her students. Aoife's low-income background, and being the daughter of teenage, unmarried parents, does not conform to the stereotypical view of being a teacher. Aoife draws attention to her parents' unplanned pregnancy and contrasts it to the experiences of women who were confined to mother and baby homes[8], which were still in operation at the time of her birth. By openly speaking about her parent's experiences, she is demonstrating resistance and challenging the shame and secrecy that was once associated with unmarried mothers in Ireland.

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[8] Mother and Baby homes, run by Catholic orders, were institutions which existed from 1922 to 1998 in Ireland where unmarried mothers were sent, often against their wishes, to have their babies. A Commission of Investigation into the mistreatment of women and children in these homes was established in 2015. https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/316d8-commission-of-investigation/

5.3.3 Theme 2.3: Valency of disclosure

Valency, that is the positive and negative effects, of disclosure (Cayanus and Martin 2008) is the focus of this theme. Meabh, Gráinne, and Niamh all recounted how they use their own lived experiences as a source to positively motivate and culturally connect with their students and to incentivise students to consider career options or pathways. They shared their experiences, not for adulation, but to forge positive relationships with students and to encourage them to consider their educational journeys beyond post-primary school. I have interpreted the participants' motivations to positively influence their students as an example of familial capital (Yosso 2005).

The valency of the participants' disclosures is situated in a relational aspect, to experience emotional closeness (Farber 2006). The participants were direct in their disclosures and purposeful in trying to draw comparisons between their experiences and those of their students:

"I would say to them like we didn't have a lot of money when we were growing up. You know I couldn't, my parents couldn't afford to pay for grinds, couldn't afford to pay for the Institute." (Gráinne, subsession 3).

"There were kids there that was just like 'No, there's no hope for me, and sure I've no way of going'. And I was like 'There's always options'. I would say very easily, 'I'm from a family of seven and both my parents were in car accidents.'" (Meabh, subsession 3).

"They can trust you and that they can come to you and say things like this: 'I don't have the money for the trip because my dad's out of work', or whatever, and I was 'Sure, I'm from a family of 10. I wouldn't have gone on any trips like, you know… it was far from such and such a thing I was reared' and they'd say 'really?'". (Niamh, subsession 3).

The participants did not seek emotional closeness for their own benefit, their aim was to create emotional closeness and forge connections with their students. They use their own experiences of financial hardship to show their students that they are not disconnected from their students' realities: "*they just need to see somebody that they can relate to*" (Meabh, subsession 3) and similarly: *"you have to have a good relationship with them and that they can trust you"* (Niamh, subsession 3).

Affirmation and validation by others have been identified as positive aspects of self-disclosure (Farber, 2006). However, the participants' narratives indicate that their motivations to self-disclose were not for personal benefit or gain:

"If my story can help somebody, absolutely, I don't mind sharing it. I'm not going to force it on people either. Being like, 'oh, look at me, I'm great, I came out of something like, I'm fantastic', that's not what it's about." (Meabh, subsession 3)

"Not to be, you know, saying I'm absolutely fantastic, not to be blowing my own trumpet, but I'm from the same area, and the same

background, and the same catchment area as they are". (Gráinne, subsession 3)

Both Meabh and Gráinne were emphatic that sharing their backgrounds was not about elevating their own status or influencing how they were perceived by others. Conversely, their motivation was the positive influence it might have on others, particularly students like themselves.

None of the participants indicated any negative interactions with students as a result of disclosing their SEG status. The negative effects of disclosing to colleagues have been previously considered in subsection 5.2.5. Gráinne and Niamh both expressed having feelings of inferiority and having to prove themselves because their backgrounds were known by their former teachers turned colleagues.

Meabh's disclosures had a positive effect on her relationships with her students which enabled her to mentor them in relation to future study and career choices and also to provide pastoral support as they trusted her. Gráinne used her disclosures to influence her students' self-worth. She used her position to challenge the stereotypes associated with her local community in relation to progression and academic achievement. Niamh disclosed her own experiences of financial hardship to build trust and develop positive relationships. Meabh also disclosed her background to some friends and members of her sports club to provide support and guidance on access routes, thereby embodying equity through access of opportunity (Childs et al. 2011).

Meabh, Gráinne, and Niamh all used their own experiences as a form of leveraging to develop and strengthen student-teacher relationships. Aoife's willingness to disclose her personal circumstances, where relevant to the teaching curriculum, has had a positive effect on developing her student's writing skills. Her purposeful disclosures, modelling reciprocity and mutual trust contributed to the creation of a safe space for her students. As with Talbot, in Conrad (2020), students' critical empathetic reasoning, respect, and autonomy, may be enriched by meaningful, relevant disclosures. Embedded in each of the participants' self-disclosures is the message that they understand their students and their concerns, they demonstrate empathy by bringing their real-world realities to the forefront (Henry and Thorsen 2021).

The participants' willingness to disclose their backgrounds and potentially put themselves at risk for negative consequences such as risk of rejection, creating undesired impressions, increased vulnerability and sense of shame (Kowalski, 1999) are indicative of their community cultural wealth. The participants are demonstrating resistant capital in sharing their experiences which are motivated by their desire to help others. Their familial capital and "commitment to community well being" (Yosso 2005, 79) is evident in their desire to forge connections and build trusting relationships with their students in order to encourage them to consider their options after school. In sharing their experiences, the participants are reducing the possibility of isolation for their students as they realise that they have support and are not alone in dealing with their situations and problems.

5.4 Sub-question three: What do participants' narratives reveal about their experiences of role models and role modelling behaviour?

This section focuses on the participants' role models on their journeys to becoming teachers. Some of the participants referred to their role models in sub-session one when asked the SQUIN. For other participants, the role models were not mentioned until subsession 3 when the question was posed directly. As detailed in chapter two, role models have the potential to influence goals and motivation of aspirants in three distinct forms: being inspirational, acting as a model for behaviour, and representing the possible (Morgenroth et al. 2015).

The participants' experiences of role models are presented in three themes using the aforementioned forms of role modelling, summarised in table 5.2 below.

	Parent	*Former teacher/Principal*	*Third level lecturer*
Aoife		I	I
Conor		I	I
Gráinne	B	B	
Meabh		B	
Neasa		R	
Niamh	B	B	
Key: I = Inspirational role model, B= Behavioural role model, R = Representing the possible			

Table 5.2 Identification of role models as a role aspirant

Each of the participants spoke of former teachers who were role models, the forms of modelling presented by their teachers encompassed the three forms: inspirational, behavioural and representing the possible. The identification of parents, specifically

fathers, as role models also featured in the participants' narratives. In the cases of Gráinne and Niamh, this type of modelling aligned with behavioural modelling.

5.4.1 Theme 3.1: Inspirational role models

The theme of role models as inspirational presents the participants' accounts of role models they perceived as having desirable characteristics, values or aspirations. The identification of role models in this category draws on Solomon's (1997, 399) definition: "as someone who positively influences a person's values, goals or outlook on life". Conor was greatly inspired to become a teacher by the values of the headmaster in his local community. In his daily work, Conor models the values displayed by one of his lecturers and also his former deputy principal. Similarly, Aoife was inspired by a teacher and lecturer; she has emulated some of their teaching methodologies and approaches in her own classroom.

Conor described the local headmaster of his Primary school as the "*real influence for me in becoming a teacher*". The headmaster was not from the locality but "*he became part of the fabric of the local area*", Conor respected the impact he had on the local area especially with regards to how he instilled the values of respect and decency. Following an incident where the headmaster addressed a discipline issue with the students, Conor recalled thinking "*I'd love to be a teacher and even have half of the opportunity to have an impact positively on people's lives*" (subsession 1). Growing up in a rural community, Conor identified "*the value that good role models in the area had on people*", particularly those involved in coaching football the GAA. They had a positive influence on "*being the change you want to be in your community*"

(subsession 3). Conor also identified the course coordinator of his teacher training programme as a role model due to his "*vision*", professionalism, and refusal to "*accept low standards*". The coordinator "*really saw the broader picture with teachers in schools and the influence you could have on young people*".

Aoife's own teaching style is influenced by two of her own teachers. When asked about role models, Aoife reminisced about one particular outstanding teacher with a very personal nature who "*had a way of bringing out the best in us as possible*" (subsession 3). Aoife mimics this approach in her own teaching as she discloses personal information about herself when appropriate to a novel or play. Aoife also described her as not "*afraid to have a laugh, but she had expectations*". Another person that Aoife models herself on was a lecturer from the PLC course who was "*phenomenal*" and "*made a big difference*". She describes that she "*felt very much taken care of*" in his class but "*also very independent*". He gave the students "*many opportunities*" to attend conferences and events and he "*put in huge hours to show us things*" and even make sure they "*were presentable*". Aoife described her joy in attending his classes "*because he gave us the opportunity to find our interests and then let us go forward with that,*" (subsession 3).

Conor and Aoife identified role models whose values and personal characteristics were desirable and inspiring to themselves. Basing their own characters and values on their role models in this manner is associated with Solomon's (1997) conceptualisation of a role model, that is someone who positively influences a

person’s values, goals, or outlook on life. Conor was greatly influenced by values of decency and respect held by his former headmaster. He aspires to have a similar effect on the school community in which he works. The potential of teachers to teach and model character and moral virtues is lauded (Lumpkin 2013; Sanderse 2013). Conor also emulates the professionalism and vision-orientated mindset that he admired in his former principal and college lecturer. Similarly, Aoife emulates the teaching methodologies and interpersonal qualities of a former teacher and lecturer that she was inspired by. The phenomenon of emulating the teaching practices and styles with which you were taught, is reported as a common occurrence (Oleson and Hora 2014).

5.4.2 Theme 3.2: Behavioural role models

This theme is concerned with the manner in which the participants learned particular behaviours and skills from their role models. The behavioural role model definition is closely aligned to Merton’s (1957) definition of a role model, focusing on skill acquisition by emulation. In addition to modelling of behaviour, also recognised are cognitive and emotional practices. In this regard, Gráinne was influenced by her father’s return to education when she was a young child. Niamh and Meabh both identified teachers from their post-primary schools who acted as behavioural role models and helped them to develop the skills and self-belief required to pursue their goals.

Gráinne was greatly inspired by her father who went back to college at the age of 45 because *“he just realised he wanted kind of something better, and a better kind of life”*. Gráinne’s father left school when he was 12 to help provide

for his family. When he returned to college as a mature student, he worked full-time and went to lectures at night, a process which took six years of "*hard work*" for him to complete his bachelor's degree. Reminiscing over the evenings Gráinne and her sister were warned to be quiet because her father was studying, Gráinne said *"for me, that was the person I really, really looked up to"* (subsession 3).

Niamh identified her Irish teacher in post-primary school as "*that one good teacher*" (subsession 1) who influenced her in school. Niamh described her as a brilliant teacher who instilled confidence in her by encouraging her ability in the subject and acknowledging her work and grades. Niamh, who was the first in her family to do the Leaving Certificate, gives credit to this teacher for giving her the belief in herself to study independently at home.

Meabh identified a number of her teachers as having a significant impression on her during her time in school. The first incident she recollected occurred shortly after her father's accident when she was six years old. She remembers the support the teacher gave her when she felt "*absolutely lost*" (subsession 2). In secondary school, Meabh specified her PE teacher and Home Economics teacher as role models for her as *"they just seemed like people to go talk to, and they kind of just gave out good advice*" (subsession 3). She had a good relationship with the PE teacher as they coached her for extra-curricular sports. She complimented these teachers for being quick to provide guidance if you were getting out of line, but also because they offered support and encouragement. Meabh also acknowledged her guidance teachers, she credits one of the guidance teachers as being the reason behind why herself and sister got into college. The guidance teacher approached Meabh and her

sister about Access routes because he knew about their situation at home. Through the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR), Meabh achieved the qualifying points for her first choice CAO course.

Morgenroth et al. (2015) attribute the term behavioural role modelling to how skill acquisition occurs, it encompasses cognitive and emotional practices. Within this concept, Gráinne's father acted as a behavioural role model in returning to education and modelling a positive attitude and strong work ethic. Gráinne, as a young child, witnessed her father's resilience in engaging in part-time study while balancing parental responsibilities and working full-time. Gráinne replicated similar aspirational capital to her father's by returning to teacher education after working as an SNA for eighteen months. Students who are parents can act as role models to their children by modelling a student identity, being aspirational to their children, and by demonstrating efficacy (Mulrenan et al. 2023). Seeing her father return to education instilled a belief that returning to education was a realistic and achievable ambition for herself. Gráinne developed behaviours, values and beliefs through observation of her father, this can also be understood through Bandura's (1977) social learning theory that posits that individuals learn through direct experience and by observing others. Gráinne demonstrated her own resilience and aspirational capital by not giving up on her desire to become a teacher, eventually becoming successful on her third attempt.

Niamh and Meabh both identified teachers that encouraged them to believe in themselves and gave them the necessary skills to achieve their goals. Their teachers offered advice and direction which resonates with the importance of a whole school

approach to guidance (DES 2009, 2012) and the opportunities for all teachers to impact on the holistic education of the student (The Teaching Council 2011). The positive relationships forged between Niamh, Meabh, and their respective teachers provided opportunities for their personal growth and development (Smyth and Coy 2013).

5.4.3 Theme 3.3: Representing the possible

Representing the possible features in this theme. Modelling from this perspective, focusing on the quality of attainability, emphasises that a goal *is* possible as distinct from *how* to achieve the goal. Central to this form of modelling is the potential for influencing someone by being seen in a role or achieving a particular goal or task. Role modelling in this respect has the potential to reinforce pre-existing goals in addition to inspiring the adoption of goals (Morgenroth et al. 2015). Neasa is the only participant who gave an account of an interaction with a teacher who was from a similar background to her own. Although there is only one occurrence of this form of modelling, and themes should consider patterns across the narratives, this interaction is included here as it raises questions about conceptualising what it means to be a role model.

Teaching was always something that Neasa always wanted to do, and it was her "*stubbornness*" that encouraged her to "*do this*" and become a teacher. Neasa described it as a "*light bulb*" moment when, in post-primary school, one of her teachers went "*on a rant*" because someone had spoken very disparagingly about being from a council estate. The teacher disclosed to the class that she herself had come from a council estate and had gone to college. Neasa had "*never really*

thought about that before then". Neasa had not considered that people "*kind of look down their noses a little bit at us*" and think "*we're not going to amount to anything, or go anywhere, or do anything*" prior to this.

Although the subject that Neasa chose to teach was influenced by this teacher, Neasa does not consider her as a role model: *"It's harsh to say that she wasn't a role model, but, I don't know why. There was never anybody that I kind of looked up to and was like, I want to be them."* (subsession 3).

The lack of role models who represent the possible is undoubtedly influenced by the lack of diversity within the teaching profession (Killeavy 1993; Clarke 2009; Keane and Heinz 2015; Darmody and Smyth 2016). Neasa had wanted to be a teacher from a young age, long before the incident which prompted her teacher to disclose their background. Neasa had positive experiences in school up until this point, which she described as a significant moment. For Neasa, this was an awakening, it was the first time she realised that she was different to the majority of her peers and that there was a perception that students like herself would not reach their full potential. Neasa's ambition to become a teacher could have faltered at this point if it were not for her own aspirational capital, or as she describes it, her stubbornness. Neasa's teacher provided equity through access (Childs et al. 2011) by influencing her resolve to pursue her goal, however the memory is somewhat tainted as it is the first time Neasa encountered a deficit view of people's perceptions of her.

Neasa did not consider that this teacher was a role model. Morgenroth et al. (2015) suggest that shared group membership increases the potential for role modelling. Neasa's stance suggests that representation alone is not sufficient. Neasa's

phraseology *"looked up to"* and *"want to be them"* is also suggestive of a problematic approach to how role models are considered. Does the connotation of needing to be like someone else or look 'up' reinforce a deficit thought process? I will return to this question in chapter six.

5.5 Sub-question 4: What, if any, are the lived experiences of teachers from low-income SEGs in relation to being a role model?

In this section, the participants' own perceptions of being a role model are presented as not being aligned with the traditional construct of role model, section 5.5.1. Their perceptions have influenced my approach to presenting their experiences. Given that the desire to be a role model was not emphatically articulated by the participants, I propose to shift from the framework for modelling, identified by Morgenroth et al. (2015), and to use the concept of representational advocacy instead to depict their experiences, section 5.5.2. I define representational advocacy as the manner in which individuals use their own lived experiences to positively influence others; central to this form of influence is visibility and connection. This concept encompasses the qualities of attainability and goal embodiment which are components of Morgenroth et al.'s framework. Their component of desirability is not considered as prominent because the participants in this research seem to distance themselves from this characteristic. Being a representational advocate featured significantly in the participants narratives, as participants described how they use their own lived experiences to motivate and support students.

The concept of representational advocacy, as proffered in this study, differs from its understanding within the field of medical health, wherein it draws on the social and medical dimensions of health promotion for people who may be vulnerable and or discriminated against (Carlisle 2000). Representational advocacy, as typically associated with the field of mental health and learning disabilities, advocates for educational and behavioural change to improve the rights and needs of those with high support needs (Carlisle 2000, Samuel 2009, Aghazadeh 2022).

For this research context, I propose that representational advocacy is intrinsically linked to community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005). An altruistic motivation coupled with insider skills and knowledge enables individuals to use their representational influence to challenge inequity and enact change. Their intervention ensures inequities are redressed which leads to positive outcomes for individuals, groups and/or systems. Representational advocacy draws on community cultural wealth in a number of ways. 1) *Familial* capital, with the bond of kinship, is used to strengthen relationships based on having shared experiences. 2) *Aspirational* capital is enhanced in others through the provision of support and encouragement which develops the self-belief necessary to realise their ambitions. 3) *Linguistic* capital, using different communication skills in different settings, helps to build connection and develop trusting relationships with students. Retaining a local dialect, for example, could foster pride and belonging. 4) A source of *social* capital is provided by creating opportunities for individuals to meet or interact with networks of people and gatekeepers therefore reducing isolation and fostering a sense of belonging. 5) *Navigational* capital is shared, not only the knowledge to manoeuvre through

systems but also to navigate emotions such as stress. 6) *Resistant* capital is used to analyse and challenge systems to make them more equitable.

5.5.1 Theme 4.1: Self-perceptions of being a role model

In this section, the self-perceptions of the participants of being a role model will be presented. None of the participants spoke about themselves as role models prior to being asked directly in their third subsessions. Although the general consensus, to whether they considered themselves to be role models, was yes; the participants' responses did not emphatically agree. The participants' responses in this theme suggest that the concept of role model did not align with their depiction of themselves, their career intentions, and how they interact with their students.

Conor's response to the question, 'Do you see yourself as a role model?' was, *"I suppose you'd be in the wrong job if you didn't see yourself as a role model".* Conor's response suggests that being a role model is associated with his position, a deputy principal, and not necessarily him as an individual. Conor was more assured in acknowledging his influence, he indicated that his self-perception of being influential is one which has evolved over time: *"as you grow up in the career…you begin to realise how much of an influence you can actually be"* (subsession 3). Similar to Conor's view, Neasa's response suggests that being a role model is not something she has full autonomy over: *"I suppose, whether I see myself as one or not, I am"* (subsession 3). However, being considered as a role model was not important for Neasa and she "*never would have even given that much thought*".

For some participants, the concept of being a role model does not seem to be an accurate representation of themselves: *"Yeah, I would, in a way"* (Gráinne, subsession 3). *"Maybe I am a kind of a role model"* (Niamh, subsession 3). Their responses, 'in a way' and 'a kind of' suggest that the concept of role model does not fully conceptualise their interactions with their students. Finally, Meabh indicated that she would like to be considered as a role model, but her response suggested hesitancy: *"I'd like to think so, whether I am or not, I don't know"* (subsession 3).

The responses from the participants suggest that the concept of role model does not align with their perceptions of themselves in their role as teachers and how they support students like themselves. One plausible explanation for this is that role models are typically associated with being on a pedestal and adulation, and the participants may not desire this form of attention. This is in line with their motivations for self-disclosure discussed in theme 2.3, valency of disclosure. The participants did not want to appear more worthy than others; Meabh did not want people to think her motivation was *"look at me, I'm great"* (subsession 3) and Gráinne was adamant that she was *"not blowing my own trumpet"* (subsession 3). Also worthy of consideration is that the function of role models in schools is typically associated with modelling moral character (Sanderse 2013), which is modelled implicitly in a non-verbal manner (Klaassen 2002). Conversely, the participants' explicitly exert their influence through disclosure of their backgrounds and advising and mentoring their students. The tensions and dilemmas associated with role modelling will be interrogated further in chapter six.

5.5.2 Theme 4.2: Representational advocacy

This theme presents the participants' experiences of representational advocacy which I have interpreted from the analysis of their narratives. Representational advocacy is suggested as a construct to define the manner in which the participants in this research used their own lived experiences to advocate for and positively influence their students. Central to representational advocacy are the relational aspects of recognition and connection. The participants were altruistically motivated to use their knowledge, wisdom, and strengths, to support and guide others from a similar demographic background. All of the participants, irrespective of disclosure of their SEG backgrounds, have shared accounts of how they use their lived experiences for representational advocacy. Yosso's (2005) framework for community cultural wealth is used to situate the participants' demonstration and enactment of representational advocacy. Although the examples given below are categorised under the forms of capital described by Yosso, this is for illustrative purposes, I acknowledge that the forms of capital are interwoven and dynamically supportive of each other.

Familial capital

Each of the participants referenced their familial capital in telling their life stories. Having shared group membership and wanting to help students like themselves, through demonstrating empathy, care, and moral values, is a feature of familial capital (Yosso 2005). There is evidence of kinship and connection in the language and terminology used to describe their connection with their students. The term *same* is referred to repeatedly: *same background* (Neasa subsession 2; Grainne subsession

2), *same community* (Conor subsession 3), *same experience* (Meabh subsession 2; Aoife subsession 3), *same area* (Niamh subsession 2) *same challenges* (Gráinne subsession 2). The participants have a common understanding and a shared group membership with their students, and this motivates them to be their advocates. The participants, with the exception of Conor, used self-disclosure of their SEG backgrounds as a tool to inform students of their shared group membership and further enhance the bonds of kinship and associated familial capital.

Gráinne shares with her students that her family did not have money growing up and that she did not have the opportunity to pay for grinds for additional support. Being from the same background as the students, she believes her students connect with her because "*they can see I'm pretty much just an older version of them, really."* Niamh's students know she is from the local area and went to the school herself. Niamh is very open with her students about the financial struggles faced by her family when she was in school. She shares this information with them to show empathy and to demonstrate that things can change. Niamh advocates for her students, or "*my kids*" as she calls them. Meabh's motivation to influence her students is to pre-empt them from going through the same struggles she herself experienced. She identifies with the "*underdog*". Meabh, who solely relied on self-disclosure to inform students about her background, did so to develop trusting relationships and provide pastoral support and guidance by being that "*one good adult"*.

Neasa believes her *"personality and the way I look at things suits the student body in"* her school. She thinks that being local makes her relatable and

"a teacher of the people". Neasa described that she will "*kind of use my knowledge of kind of where I'm from and kind of the background that I grew up with to contextualise*" her teaching and to make it more understandable and relatable. Aoife describes herself as being very familiar with the culture of her current school which has enabled her to be *"far more open to being, to building that relationship with them"*. Aoife reflected at length about the importance of culture in a school, she described the culture of her current school as *"centred around community and bonding."*

The participants in this research developed relational structures of familial capital through extra-curricular activities with their students. Meabh, Niamh, Neasa and Conor are all involved in coaching school sports teams. Neasa describes coaching teams as massively important for building positive relationships with her students because it gives you an increased opportunity to get to know the students, *"you can see kind of their sense of humour, and they get to see a different side to you as well."*

Although Conor doesn't disclose his low-income SEG status, he still exerts his influence from a representational perspective. Conor describes the school he is working in as *"very closely aligned to the community"* he grew up in. He believes he has "*an understanding of people from that type of background because I grew up in that myself*". Conor uses this understanding to connect with students and his colleagues. Conor works closely with students and their families by building connections. Conor's motivation with implementing interventions and programs is "*to make them feel part of the school",* he acknowledges that

getting parents on board is *"a huge, huge thing"* and he has been involved in programs *"for building linkages with parents and getting them in and helping them see, school isn't as bad as maybe we thought, or whatever their experiences of school has been".*

Being from the same background as the students and using their insider knowledge to understand their students' circumstances has enhanced the development of trusting relationships, this is comparable to research on the development of positive mentor-student relationships (Hannon et al. 2017). The disclosure of their backgrounds, either because they were already known in the community or by purposeful self-disclosure, informed students that they shared a cultural understanding, which is of benefit to the students (Redding 2019). The development of initiatives to include family members and involvement with extra-curricular activities serve to further strengthen links with the community and enhance the bonds of kinship. Familial capital was shared by fostering a sense of inclusion and belonging in building connection through one-to-one relationships and group activities.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital is the resilience to sustain hopes and dreams in the face of adversity. The teachers in this research demonstrate on an individual level and using a whole-school approach how they encourage their students to aspire and dream of possibilities.

Gráinne and Niamh are both known to be former students in their schools, they draw on this to encourage their students. Gráinne tells her students she "*went through the exact same system you're going through now, and if I can do it, you can too*". She encourages her students to consider their options by saying to them "*just because you're from here, doesn't mean you have to have a lesser value in life".* Niamh believes *"they know that if they wanted to go on to become a teacher, course they can like, they know I did it, they can do it".* Neasa also encourages her students to have aspirations but she reminds them that it may require determination. She encourages her students to have a strong work ethic if they want to change their circumstances she maintains "*you need to show people that nothing gets handed to you, you need to work for whatever you want to do.*"

Meabh also draws on her experiences to encourage students to explore options in relation to pathways after school, she has said to students "*look, I was like you, I took an option and look where I am now, there are options for you*". Meabh demonstrates her influence by guiding students and providing encouragement. She always tries to ensure that if she notices something is amiss with a student that "*you pick up on those things*" and encourage the student to speak up. Meabh's aspiration for her students moves beyond the academic realm and she considers personal growth too. She hopes that "*in years to come*" the kindness and encouraging behaviour she demonstrates will encourage her students to develop "*that empathy and that caring side*" and they too will be willing to listen and help if necessary.

From a whole school perspective, Conor has considered, in his role of deputy principal, how much of a positive or negative influence he can be. Although "*it's a bit harsh*" it is "*like that old saying, people are radiators or drains*". If you "*radiate positivity*", not by being the happiest person all the time, but by having a positive approach and "*want to do things right*" you can have "*a huge influence on the staff".* In turn this influences the school and then the whole community. Conor firmly believes "*if there's something we're willing to ask the students to do, we have to be living that already*", whether it is in relation to expectations, how you approach people, or work ethic.

The participants share their aspirational wealth with their students both directly and indirectly. Direct forms include positive encouragement, intentional conversations, and practical guidance. Aspirational capital is spread indirectly through knowledge of other people's achievements and the ripple effect of positive interactions.

Linguistic capital

Two of the participants, Gráinne and Niamh, shared that the communities in which they grew up have strong recognisable local accents. Both of these teachers use their local accents to connect with their students to varying degrees. Having a shared accent with their students enables their students to identify with them and encourages their students to believe they are "*no different*" (Gráinne, subsession 3).

Gráinne's students *"would pick up that I kind of talk the same as them"* which she uses to connect with them. Gráinne "*would often get on a lot better*"

with students who present with challenging behaviour. She believes this is because they identify with her, "*they don't see me as, you know, the alien in the room*". Grainne recognises the *slang* words that the students use and she would use them at times to create a positive atmosphere, *"they erupt and they'd be laughing and they take it very well."* Gráinne also uses the students' dialect to encourage them to cooperate*, "I'd say, come on bro, now let's go, let's sit down, and they respond very well".* Gráinne has noticed that some students will open up to her more than they do with other teachers. She has experienced that some students can distance themselves from certain teachers because *"they would kind of think that if you've a different accent you're out of touch or something."*

Niamh's local accent and dialect has changed over the years as she assimilated into the teaching profession. She recounted speaking to a student about where she was from, and the student remarked that they wouldn't have known by her accent. Niamh's response *"I kinda do. I can turn it on when I want to."* This suggests that Niamh will revert to her original local accent if the situation warrants it.

The linguistic capital Gráinne and Niamh possess, enables them to draw on different language styles to communicate with different audiences (Yosso 2005), this is particularly evident from Gráinne's narrative. Although Niamh uses her linguistic capital to a lesser extent, both teachers draw on their local accents and communication styles to improve relationships with their students. The use of linguistic capital in this manner, strengthens the bonds of kinship associated with familial capital.

Social and navigational capital

Social capital refers to social contacts, community resources, and networks of people which provide practical and emotional support to navigate through institutions. Navigational capital relates to the ability to manoeuvre social institutions which perpetuate inequality (Yosso 2005). In this research the participants demonstrated how they invoke their social capital to strengthen their students' navigational capital. Therefore, these two forms of capitals will be considered together.

Niamh uses her position as year head to act as an advocate for access routes and speaks to students in assemblies about the process and her own experiences of attending third level through an access route. She actively encourages her students to apply for programmes such as Trinity Access Programme (TAP) and the Higher Education Access route (HEAR). Niamh develops the students' social and navigational capitals by organising events and activities to provide experiences they might otherwise not have the opportunity to partake in. She organises major fundraisers to offset costs of trips for students, for example to the Gaeltacht.

In addition to coaching sports in her school, Meabh is very involved with the student mentoring programme. She uses these additional interactions with students as opportunities to discuss their aspirations for their future and gives guidance on how to achieve their goals when relevant. Meabh has also used her insider knowledge of HEAR access route to advise some of her friends to investigate their eligibility as they were from "*the same sort of cohort*" as her. Meabh is cognisant of the emotional aspect of supporting students. Being "*that one good person*" is not just about the

academic side of school, it is about providing support for students as they navigate difficult times, especially "*where things are tough at home or something's after happening, and they just don't know how to comprehend it, and they're reacting a certain way because of it.*"

Niamh and Meabh exemplify Childs et al. (2011) dual perspectives of equity in and equity through access of opportunity by virtue of qualifying for their teacher education courses through access routes and subsequently influencing their current students through representing the possible. Through exposure to new and differing experiences, the students are given opportunities to develop their own social and navigational capitals, this in turn could have a positive effect on their aspirational wealth.

Niamh and Meabh are highly committed to supporting their students and advocating for them. Both of these teachers have expressed that their work has been personally demanding. Niamh disclosed that she has invested much of herself in working with, and on behalf of, her students over the years. She stated: *"I suppose I'm known in the area as like, I committed my life to [School name]. Before I had kids, that was it, there was nothing else. My life was [School name], like for 15 - 16 years I did nothing else but teach in [School name] and, you know, I'd do things at weekends. And it was my… it was... blood, sweat and tears went into it"* (Niamh subsession 3).

Meabh acknowledged the emotional costs of investing a lot of time in her work, "*you'd deal with a lot of burnout if you completely invest yourself in*

that all the time. There's only so much of yourself that you can give to that. I can see with other teachers, you are exhausted by it. I came out exhausted. I'm glad I was there if kids ever needed you, but you come out some days and you bring it home. I was young and I'd bring it home and I'd be upset" (Meabh subsession 2).

Resistant capital

The participants through sharing their knowledge and experience of the system demonstrate to students not only their navigational capital but also their resistant capital. Resistant capital is the knowledge developed through challenging inequality and resisting subordination (Yosso 2005). Niamh and Aoife both shared incidents which I have interpreted as resistant capital.

Niamh uses her position as a senior staff member in her school to challenge how she believes her teaching colleagues should interact with their students. It is important to Niamh that her students are treated "*like they're normal people*" and she willingly discusses details about her present family life with them, unlike some of her colleagues who she describes as having "*hierarchical*" views. Following an incident where a colleague questioned her about a conversation she had with a student, Niamh frustratedly responded *"they're just kids, like, talk to them like you want your kids to be spoken to in school."* Niamh challenges the culture espoused by some of colleagues to remain distant from the students, she disagrees with this mindset, because being standoffish suggests *"that you're better than*

them." Niamh's actions in identifying and challenging inequality in this manner showcases her resistant capital.

As stated previously, Aoife, when drawing on her personal life stories, predominantly discloses that she is the result of a teenage pregnancy. The intersectionality of her low-income socio-economic status and her parents ages at the time of her birth are discussed with students when relevant and appropriate to the curriculum she teaches. Aoife's disclosure of being a child from a teenage pregnancy and how it has affected her has opened up conversations about *"sexism and feminism and dealing with sexualities and dealing with teenage pregnancies and dealing with pregnancies outside of marriage"*. In some instances, students are "*taken aback*" as "*they don't associate it with somebody standing at the top of a classroom in front of them.*" For other students, it has prompted them to share their own backgrounds and discuss personal impacts and feelings of empathy. Aoife believes that opening up to students and "*the relationship that you build, without a doubt*" is one of the biggest impacts on classroom culture. Aoife's disclosures demonstrate resistance capital as she changes students' stereotypical views of the teaching profession.

Conclusion

The participants in this research could be considered as *change agents* (Keane, Heinz, and Lynch 2020). Keane et al. depict a change agent as an individual who desires to give back, sets high expectations, and is highly committed in their work, particularly with students from similarly congruent backgrounds. The teachers in this study

openly discussed their experiences of access routes, financial difficulties, and other personal information to highlight to their students that they understood the students' perspective. Resounding through their narratives is the message that 'I did it, you can too'. However, caution is advised with this mindset (Heinz and Keane 2018), this is potentially problematic as it assumes everyone can overcome barriers in the same manner when other dynamics might be at play. I will return to the potentially problematic aspects in the next chapter. Also concerning are the reports of exhaustion and potential burnout disclosed by two of the participants. This suggests a need for a whole school approach to guidance and supportive mentoring programmes for new teachers, this will be discussed further in chapter six.

Through representational advocacy, the participants, "nurture a culture of possibility" (Yosso 2005, 78). They share their aspirational capital and have high hopes and expectations for the students they work with. They draw on their own community cultural wealth, specifically their linguistic and/or familial capitals, to not only develop positive relationships with their students but also to develop and nurture their students' own aspirational capital.

5.6 Synopsis

The teachers from low-income SEGS involved in this research were altruistically motivated to become teachers. They draw on their aspirational and familial capital in their desires to make a difference and be the one good adult for students like themselves. The participants were influenced to become teachers by the aspirational and familial cultural wealth of their parents and the value placed on education within

their family circles. They were supported in their journeys by the social capital aspect of community cultural wealth provided by their former school principals. The participants used their resistant and navigational cultural wealth to overcome the following obstacles in becoming teachers: a lack of insider knowledge of institutional processes such as the CAO and PAC systems; having to work part-time due to financial limitations; and managing feelings of isolation and of not belonging. The participants' tenacity is a central characteristic of their collective community cultural wealth.

The participants' experiences in relation to the disclosure of their SEG status indicate the following: disclosure of one's SEGs status may be a purposeful decision or may be unavoidable due to being known in the local community. Teachers from low-income SEGs disclose their backgrounds to provide support and to culturally connect with students like themselves. Disclosure of their low-income SEG status was also used for pedagogical purposes and to develop the relational aspect of teaching.

Teachers from low-income SEGs who work in their local communities may not experience the same level of vulnerability in relation to self-disclosure as those who are not known to the school community. Purposeful self-disclosure was not used by the participants for personal adulation, but to develop and strengthen teacher-student relationships and also as a teaching asset within the classroom. Self-disclosure which focused on the relational domain served to show empathy to students and to provide support and motivation. The prevalence of self-disclosure of this nature was more common in urban schools which had a higher proportion of students from low-income communities. Pedagogical aspects of teacher self-disclosure modelled reciprocity, encouraged mutual trust, and the development of

critical thinking skills. Evident in their motivations for disclosure is the wealth of the participants' community cultural capital. The aspirational capital of the participants, in wanting their students to achieve their potential, is interwoven with their familial, social, and resistant capitals.

The teachers from low-income SEGs involved in this research identified their parents, former teachers, principals and lecturers as role models. Former teachers and lecturers provided inspirational forms of modelling with regards to the values they demonstrated, the significant impact they had on the whole community, and the pedagogical approaches they implemented. Parents and teachers provided behavioural role modelling by demonstrating and imparting the cognitive and emotional elements of goal embodiment. The participants' role models provided examples of strong interpersonal skills, high moral values, dedicated work ethic and resilience, and the ability to impart self-belief, all of which have been emulated by the participants. The positive role models in their lives have greatly attributed to the development of their navigational and aspirational cultural wealth.

Only one participant identified an experience of modelling with respect to representing the possible, an encounter with a teacher from a similar background to themselves. However, it wasn't a wholly positive experience and the participant in question did not consider this teacher to be a role model. Further discussion on the conceptualisation of role modelling will be considered in the next chapter.

There was a hesitancy, by the participants, to identify as role models. To be respectful to their narratives the concept of representational advocacy was introduced as an

alternative. Participants who disclose their SEG status, either by being known in the local community or through purposeful self-disclosure could be viewed as having a stronger representational influence with students from similar backgrounds. Disclosure of their backgrounds has encouraged their students to identify with them and make positive connections. These teachers use their lived experiences and insider knowledge as conduits to foster the development of positive relationships and to provide relatable teaching moments in the classroom. Self-disclosure of their experiences enabled participants to demonstrate the skills and knowledge required to navigate the system. Irrespective of self-disclosure, the participants in this research demonstrated their capacities to share their community cultural wealth with students from similar backgrounds thereby illustrating that they are strong positive representational advocates.

In this chapter I have presented, and situated with respect to existing established theory and literature, the experiences of the participants in relation to: becoming a teacher, disclosing their SEG status, identifying their role models, and demonstrating representational advocacy. The next chapter will discuss further issues for additional deliberation, including potentially problematic concerns associated with role modelling.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The central research question of this study was to consider the role modelling potential of post-primary teachers from low-income socio-economic groups as interpreted from their narrated life stories. This research explored the lived experiences of the participants in relation to becoming teachers, disclosure of their SEG status, and their role modelling experiences and influences. This study, while recognising the value of existing research pertaining to the experiences of this under-represented group in the teaching profession, distances itself from deficit thinking models in which such research is generally situated. Instead, it highlights the powerful community cultural wealth that teachers from low-income SEGs share with their students and argues that representational advocacy provides a more nuanced understanding of the transformational capacities of these teachers in place of traditional conceptualisations of role modelling. It also demonstrates a higher quality educational experience wherein all pupils and teachers experience solidarity and community.

In this concluding chapter, I reflect on how this research has made a contribution to knowledge. Firstly, I discuss the tensions and dilemmas associated with role modelling and suggest representational advocacy as an alternative construct. I make recommendations for policy and practice to support teachers from low-income SEGs in their journey of becoming. I also reflect on the methodological approach of this

research before addressing the limitations of the research. Finally, I suggest avenues for additional research.

6.2 Role modelling – tensions and dilemmas

This research explored the lived experiences of role modelling from the perspectives of six post-primary teachers from low-income SEGs who are teaching in schools with DEIS status. By presenting the participants' own considerations of their career motivations and interactions with their students this study contributes to research on role modelling, representation with respect to social class, and diversity within the teaching profession.

Advocates for role modelling do so on the premise that representation matters. Shared group membership or teacher-matching research, which is largely situated in the context of race and ethnicity, demonstrates student benefits associated with having a teacher from a demographically similar background. This research indicates increases in student achievement (Dee 2004; Egalite, Kisida, and Winters 2015), positive effects on teacher perceptions of student engagement, ability and performance (Dee 2005, 2007) benefits for students' academic perceptions and attitudes (Egalite and Kisida 2018) and improved student attendance and reduced suspensions (Holt and Gershenson 2015). Additional theories for increased representation suggest that, firstly, teachers of colour are critical role models for all children and not exclusively to children of colour, and secondly, teachers of colour bring an inherent understanding of the backgrounds and experiences of students of colour (Villegas, Strom, and Lucas 2012). Representation does matter, not only for

the positive contributions towards student success but also for moving towards an equitable society. However, is role modelling the solution?

At a fundamental level, role modelling may appear to be compatible with arguments for improved representation, nevertheless, I support Keane's (2023b) standpoint that role modelling is complex and requires nuanced consideration. I suggest that caution be advised with respect to role modelling and suggest representational advocacy as a more appropriate alternative. Role modelling, as discussed in chapter two, involves observation of behaviours, values, attributes, or characteristics of a person, who is viewed as admirable or inspirational, which subsequently leads to imitation or emulation of that person and their qualities. This presents tensions and dilemmas with respect to socio-economic class, as emerged from this research. Firstly, tensions exist between teachers' motivations to seek social justice and the reproductive nature of role modelling. Secondly, teachers from low-income SEGs may not be identifiable, therefore their ability to be a role model to students from demographically congruent backgrounds relies on self-disclosure. Finally, concerns arise in relation to the alleviation of responsibility for the whole profession if the onus is on role models for culturally responsive teaching.

6.2.1 Tension between social justice motivations and the perception of role modelling

The participants in this research were hesitant to call themselves role models. In this study, I have interpreted this as a rejection of the hierarchical nature of role modelling. Role models are typically considered to placed be on a pedestal, to be viewed as someone to look up to, and a person worthy of imitation or emulation. This conceptualisation of a role model conflicts with the participants' social justice

orientations motivations of becoming teachers. Their motivation of being that *one good adult* is contradicted by a construct which suggests they perceive themselves as more worthy than others. The participants do not seek to be looked up to, they refuted any speculation that their motivations were for personal gain.

The conceptualisation of role modelling which aligns with imitation and emulation is also problematic as the reproductive aspect is consistent with a deficit thinking model. If the role model's qualities are deemed worthy of imitation, it implies that the individuals' existing qualities and character are inferior and require fixing. The participants in this research do not want to create replicants of themselves, nor do they view their students as broken. They want to empower their students and encourage them to be their authentic selves.

6.2.2 Dilemma of self-disclosure to be 'seen'

You have to see it to be it is a quote attributed to Billie Jean King, as she discussed the importance of female role models to encourage sports participation in young girls. To a certain extent, there is merit in the quote, representation can inspire and nurture aspirations, however the argument is somewhat flawed. Consider the experiences of the participants in this research, the only participant to *see it* was Neasa and her experience wasn't a positive one, representational modelling exposed discrimination that she hadn't noticed before. The remaining participants didn't have the opportunity to *see it,* but they succeeded in being *it*. Adhering to mantras similar to this one diminishes the other influences at play, such as the individuals' community cultural wealth and their support networks. As this research demonstrates, the value placed on having an education in the family homes and the aspirational capital of

their parents and other family members contributed significantly to their decisions to become teachers. These mantras also insinuate that redressing the diversity balance is the responsibility of the trailblazers when fundamental systemic change is actually required.

Seeing *it* is also problematic with respect to socio-economic class. Unless a teacher is recognised as being from an area, identifiers with respect to social class can be largely invisible and go unnoticed. If teachers from low-income backgrounds are to be upheld as role models, does that place an onus on them to self-disclose, if so, what are the ethical implications? The possible negative consequences of disclosure as identified by Kowalski (1999) should not be overlooked, these include: risk of rejection, fear of burdening others, creating undesired impressions, regret for not sharing sooner, increased vulnerability, and a sense of shame. This research makes a new contribution to knowledge by presenting the self-disclosure experiences of teachers from low-income SEGs. Their accounts of the frequency, relevance, and valency of their disclosures indicate that self-disclosure is a personal choice which is influenced by contextual issues. This study indicates that self-disclosure is relational and situational. The participants who purposely disclosed did so to develop positive relationships with their students and to increase their students' aspirational capital.

The participants in this research shared their experiences of deconstructing and reconstructing their identities as they situated themselves into a predominantly middle-class profession. This included some instances of class matching behaviours as they assimilated into the profession and struggled with belonging. Placing a moral

obligation to *be seen* creates additional tensions for teachers from low-income SEGs as they navigate their early career identities.

6.2.3 Limits of role modelling

The argument that role modelling alone is sufficient to explain and account for the influence of teachers is also a deficient one (Britzman 1993; Martino 2014). The assumption that a student from a low-income SEG will automatically identify with a teacher from a similar demographic is somewhat naïve and idealistic. Reducing the identifiable features of role models solely on the basis of socio-economic class presents a form of stereotyping. There are a myriad of characteristics which influence identification of role models such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, personality, etc. (Britzman 1993). Furthermore, drawing on Santoro's (2015) research on racially and ethnically minority teachers, this narrow view suggests that teachers from low-income groups are a homogenous group who can respond to the needs all low-income students.

Revisiting Neasa's experience with her demographically similar teacher, commonalities in their social class background were insufficient for Neasa to consider her as a role model. Sanderse's (2013) research on teachers as role models indicates that students frequently do not recognise the contribution of teachers to their development at the time, but rather retrospectively. He posits that it is only when an individual has acquired specific character traits themselves that they can recognise those traits in others and acknowledge the contribution made.

A reliance on role models to address issues relating to equity may also have limiting effects with respect to educating diverse student populations. Research on a policy framework for deploying male role models for male teacher recruitment has shown it exacerbated equity concerns. Instead, further attention is suggested on the politics of representation and homogenising tendencies for male and minority teachers (Martino 2014). Policies based on diversity and matching approaches could be counter-intuitive; diversity tokenism could inhibit transformation in schools and society and counteract equity (Heinz and Keane 2018). Two of the participants in this research experienced micro-aggressions from their colleagues, leading them to consider that they were not hired on their own merit. Niamh and Gráinne began their teaching careers believing they had to prove themselves. This perception raises concerns for low-income teachers in relation to managing sustainable workloads. There is additional concern that teachers from this demographic will be expected to take on additional work to address issues of inequity in schools. Santoro's (2015) study indicates that teachers from under-represented groups can be pigeon-holed for tasks and activities which are not expected of the majority groups, this additional workload can lead to burnout and attrition from the profession. Santoro's findings echo those of Solomon (1997) who argued that minority teachers face potentially debilitating cultural, psychological, and social pressures from the expectations placed on them by colleagues, students and parents. The responsibility to be a culturally responsive teacher (Villegas and Lucas 2002) should not solely be the remit of under-represented teachers but a responsibility for the profession collectively.

6.2.4 Representational advocacy - a theoretical contribution

This research proposes the concept of representational advocacy (as distinct from its understanding in the field of health promotion) as a contribution to theoretical knowledge. My own analysis of the participants' narratives indicated that the concept of role modelling did not align with the participants' experiences and interactions with their students. A shift away from the concept of role modelling and towards the development of a new construct was in keeping with my ethical commitment to place the voice of the participants at the centre of this research. Being a representational advocate is offered as an alternative frame to being a role model based on my interpretations of how the participants perceive themselves. This construct acknowledges how teachers enact their agency by forging connections and relationships with students from demographically similar backgrounds in order to strengthen the students' community cultural wealth. In this research, the participants articulated how they used their familial, social, and linguistic capitals to connect, and build positive relationships with their students. The participants indicated how they used their aspirational capital to ignite and strengthen the students' own aspirational capital. The teachers spoke of how they shared the skills and knowledge they acquired in building their navigational capital. Finally, they demonstrated resistant capital by challenging systemic inequity for the benefit of their students.

Representational advocacy is aligned with the participants' social justice motivation for becoming teachers. Their altruistic career motivations, to help students like themselves, was declared and demonstrated in their narrated experiences. Throughout our conversations, it was evident that the participants were highly

motivated to share their skills and knowledge, their community cultural wealth. The participants in this research demonstrated a wealth of skills and knowledge as they traversed class boundaries and became teachers. Imparting their community cultural wealth was motivated by empathy, concern, and a genuine desire to help students like themselves without any expectation for something in return. The participants sought to develop the students' community cultural wealth by sharing their own lived experiences. In sharing their community cultural wealth, the participants' were not engaging in reproductive practices, nor were they implying that their students were in need of interventions or fixing. The teachers in this research did not wish to be emulated, their motivation was to nurture their students' individuality and support their students' interests and aspirations.

Representational advocacy can be enacted irrespective of whether a teacher self-discloses their own SEG status thereby removing any moral dilemma for teachers who may not wish to disclose. Conor, who did not disclose his SEG background, demonstrated how he enacted representational influence by working closely with individual students and implementing whole school initiatives. I hypothesise that representational advocacy and the subsequent strengthening of a students' community cultural wealth is enhanced by the students' cognisance of demographic similarity to their teacher. Providing clear examples to students and creating opportunities for honest and open discussions is suggested as a benefit of coming out with respect to working-class disclosures (Crew 2020). Teacher self-disclosures inform students that the potential exists for shared cultural understanding, this may lead to the development of trust and reciprocity which could enrich opportunities to

expand community cultural wealth. However, the decision to self-disclose must rest with the individual practicing teacher.

Representational advocacy is not proffered as a means of diversifying the teaching profession. The limits of role modelling with respect to diversification, assumptions of homogeneity, overburdening under-represented teachers, and the collective responsibility of all teachers to be culturally responsive, are equally considered as pertinent with respect to representational advocacy. These limiting factors are not the responsibility of under-represented groups, fundamental systemic change ought to be considered. In the next section, the lived experiences of the participants and their valuable first-hand knowledge is reconsidered from the perspective of supporting new entrants from low-income SEGs into the profession.

6.3 Becoming – Recommendations for policy and practice

This research sought to explore the lived realities of teachers from low-income SEGs to provide insights into this under-represented group's experiences of becoming teachers. Whilst this research has largely focused on the wealth and strengths of these teachers, their families, and their communities, their wealth and strength is not always enough to overcome the inherent flaws in the system. Breaking the inter-generational nature of poverty requires an education system that is equitable, inclusive and well-resourced (Fleming, Harford and Hyland 2022). The participants' narrated experiences contribute to knowledge in the field of diversity in the teaching profession which is used here as the basis for recommendations to support measures to improve representation.

National policy and practice

This research bears testimony to the value placed on education in the homes of teachers from low-income SEGs. For some of the participants, entering the teaching profession was recommended by parents due to the high esteem held for the career. The significance of job security was referenced by Aoife and Conor. There is valid concern that the status of the teaching profession is diminishing in Ireland and it no longer retains its legacy of being a financially secure career path. The casualisation of the profession coupled with rising living costs across many parts of the country render teaching as a non-viable career option. It can take six years for entrants into the profession to qualify through a consecutive programme, this generally consists of a separate four year undergraduate degree followed by the two year Professional Masters of Education. This is the route for many entrants to post-primary teaching and it is financially demanding, as Meabh, Aoife, Neasa, and Conor testified.

Casualisation of the profession, including the increase in short-term contracts, means that new teachers often have to work for a number of years before they attain a Contract of Indefinate Duration (CID), formerly known as a permanent contract. Neasa alluded to her luck and relief in securing her teaching post as she didn't experience the nightmare of *"hopping from school to school".* The financial uncertainty in conjunction with the lengthy duration of training has made teaching less attractive (O'Doherty and Harford 2018) and has likely compounded the current teacher crisis (Harford and Fleming 2023). This is particularly significant for potential teachers from low-income SEGs as they may not have the financial reserves to fall back on during their six years in third level or as they wait for favourable teaching

contracts. The teachers in this study were not financially motivated to become teachers, however the desire to become a teacher could be eroded by concerns relating to job security and financial stability.

Recommendations to the Department of Education arising for the participants' experiences indicate a need for additional financial support, this could be achieved as follows: reduction in fees for the PME, increased funding and opportunities for students from low-income SEGs, paid teacher placement during the PME, additional tax incentives/credits for early career teachers, review of teaching contracts system, and reducing the over-reliance on short-term temporary contracts in schools.

Higher Education Institutes and Initial Teacher Education

This research depicts the harsh reality that students from low-income SEGs have feelings of isolation on transition into higher education. Conor and Meabh reported feeling out of place in Higher Education, Neasa and Niamh were alienated by family and friends on their transition. Increased attention is warranted on how systems can be improved to increase feelings of belonging and reduce feelings of imposter syndrome. This study suggest that feelings of belonging could be enhanced through the provision of additional networking opportunities and an emphasis on the supportive role of representational advocates.

The exepriences of Aoife and Conor suggest that additional support is needed for students who aim to be first generational teachers, particularly in relation to CAO and course application processes. Increased outreach programmes which give information on CAO and PAC applications and the different requirements for

concurrent and consecutive teaching programmes are warranted. The presence of a representative from an HEI in a school sends a clear message that students are wanted at an institution. Student attendance at open days may not always be feasible due to transport issues, financial costs, or concerns over missing school time. Career guidance provision in schools may also be hindered due to the current teacher supply issues.

The participants in this research indicated that teaching placement was significantly challenging due to financial constraints. Teaching placement typically incurs additional costs for students, such as transport costs, accomodation, materials, etc. Balancing placement, study, and part-time work was reported as exhaustive. Additional lobbying by ITEs, and other stakeholders like teacher's unions and the Teaching Council, for paid placements for students could relieve the financial strain experienced by students from low-income SEGs. Supporting the student in attaining Teaching Coucil registration prior to placement is also recommended. In some schools, student teachers cannot avail of casual substitution work while on placement as they are not registered with the Teaching Council.

Finally, there is a responsibility on all institutions engaged with teacher education, either pre-service or in-career development, to develop programs which respond to the needs of our diverse student body, and to develop teachers' confidence and competence in being culturally responsive educators.

Schools

Teacher Induction programmes, such as the Droichead[9] programme, have a vital role to play in offering guidance and support to new teachers, including those from low-income SEGs. These programmes are appropriately situated to assist beginning teachers with their personal and professional development. The professional support teams in situ in schools, trained by the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT), are ideally placed to provide meaningful opportunities to mentor new teachers and encourage them to have a voice in relation to the supports they require. All school staff have a part to play in welcoming new teachers so that feelings of isolation do not manifest.

All school staff are advised to be cognisant of deficit forms of thinking when interacting with students. Opportunities to develop and nurture their students' community cultural wealth should be investigated and implemented. This research highlights that consideration should be given to the important role parents and guardians play in determining their childs future, even if they had limited educational opportunities themselves. Schools should explore further opportunities to engage with parents to ensure the appropriate continuum of support is provided to meet the needs of the student.

This research also indicates that career guidance in schools is crucial for students who are first generational. Appropriate career guidance, as advised by the DES (2009), is

[9] The Droichead process is the induction support provided by the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) for new teachers. https://www.teacherinduction.ie/en/supports/droichead

essential to prepare students with the necessary navigational capital required. Schools should foster an approach to career guidance which utilises the transparent transmission of information with respect to access routes and encourages guest speakers from HEIs in addition to promoting attendance at open days.

Teachers from low-income SEGs

This study highlights the potential contributions made by teachers from low-income SEGs as they act as representational advocates for their students. Their influence as a *one good adult* cannot be underestimated, however, this should not come at a personal cost. Finding their *authentic self* will be a process of personal and professional development, therefore, drawing on their own cultural wealth and seeking support from family, mentors, and colleagues is strongly encouraged.

6.4 Methodological contribution

One of the key strengths of this study is a methodological contribution which allowed for a more ethical, respectful, and nuanced way to make sense of participants' experiences, journeys, and contributions to their students' lives. BNIM interviewing ensured that the lived experiences of the participants were at the heart of this research and their voices to the forefront.

The free-associative approach to the SQUIN in subsession one enabled a wealth of information to be shared and ensured that no issues were precluded. The second subsession, with the parameter that only allows for development or clarification of content which emerged in subsession one, gave full autonomy to the participants over the events and issues they wished to discuss. Participants were informed of the

interviewer requirements during the first two subsessions. This ensured an understanding that my silence in subsession one and questioning approach in subsession two were purposeful and respectful, and not misconstrued as lacking interest or enthusiasm.

The format of the first two subsessions contributed positively to the overall development of trust throughout the participants' engagement with the research. The construct of the subsessions facilitated a relaxed and non-threatening exchange. Quite frequently participants veered off track, which enriched the process. A number of times I was asked, *Where was I?* or *What was the question again?* These moments, when participants digressed, often provided an insight into their thought processes and values, which may not have been shared through other interview approaches.

The third subsessions proved invaluable to identify common trajectories between the participants and uncover the enormous asset of the community cultural wealth of the participants. It unearthed how their multitude of capitals and corresponding skills and knowledge are enacted across multiple dimensions including their own personal development, their interactions with their students, and their challenge of systemic inequity.

The ten-step process of research and analysis, which I implemented in this study, allowed for an iterative approach to the research design. Data collection, analysis, and interpretation were not seen as distinct phases of the research, instead these phases overlapped and intertwined. Stepping away from the field following the first two subsessions enabled me to delve deeper into the participants' narratives and to

consider emergent themes. Subsequent returning to the field for subsession 3 provided opportunities for development and clarification of these themes and allowed for discussion on my interpretations of comparisons across the participants' experiences.

The approach to analysis of narratives, which was influenced by Schutze (1977) six step technique, also supported my methodological commitment to ensure the participants' experiences were represented and interpreted authentically. Each meeting was transcribed by me within a short timeframe. The audio files were re-listened to during the preparation of the participants life stories and returned to again at various points when I explored *how* the participants expressed themselves and not solely *what* they said. This approach ensured familiarity with the participants' words and intentions. At multiple phases throughout the research, member reflections were invited from the participants, this safeguarded that the research was conducted with the participants and not on them.

6.5 Limitations

The sample size and sampling method used in this research is considered a limitation to this study. Snowball sampling was a suitable method to use as it is appropriate when researching hidden populations (Heckthorn 1997) and features interpersonal relations (Browne 2005). Being known to the participants directly, or recommended by a mutual acquaintance, increased the development of trust and increased the likelihood of the participants sharing their experiences honestly. However, because

the participants were known by me, or referred through a mutual contact, the geographical range is limited to four counties in Leinster.

The sample is not reflective of the general teaching population with respect to ethnicity or cultural diversity, this may be due to the sampling method and the inclusion criteria for this study. The teachers in this study all volunteered to participate, therefore, their experiences may not be reflective of all teachers from low-income SEGs. The aim of this research is not to make generalisations, instead, the aim is transferability. The transferability of this study is supported by the detailed methodology presented in chapter three and by the provision of thick contextual descriptions throughout.

6.6 Further research

The purpose of this research was to foreground the voices of teachers from low-income SEGs. The inclusion of additional voices was not considered as necessary or appropriate to share the lived experiences of these teachers. However, community cultural wealth is an under researched topic in the field of education and is worthy of additional consideration. There is scope to further research the significance of community cultural wealth and representational advocacy as follows:

- Further examination of the experiences of teachers from under-represented groups from the perspective of their positioning as representational advocates and their perception of their community cultural wealth.
- Exploration of parents and guardians' perceptions of community cultural wealth and how it is enacted, nurtured, and developed in the home.

- Explorations of students’ perceptions of community cultural wealth and their experience of representational advocates.
- There is scope for future research in exploring the impact of class matching mannerisms on community cultural wealth, for example linguistic capital. Additional questions remain as to whether an individual’s assimilation to the middle-class ideology of language style sends subliminal messages to students about class difference.
- Examination of the hiring practices of school authorities and their experiences of working with teachers who are representational advocates.
- Consideration of how community cultural wealth and representational advocacy can be used to rethink approaches to policy development and implementation rather than focusing on deficiencies and challenges.

6.7 Final thoughts

This study has been situated in an ethics of care (Ellis 2016). I have upheld an ethical stance throughout by demonstrating care, compassion, and integrity to ensure the voices of the participants were heard. I am deeply grateful to Meabh, Neasa, Aoife, Conor, Niamh, and Gráinne for trusting me with their life stories. I entrust that their stories will be received by a welcome audience and their lived experiences will be recognised, not as deficit based, but as a testimony of their collective strength, deliberation, and wealth. Teachers from low-income SEGs may be financially broke, but they are not broken. Listening to their stories is essential to redress inequities in our educational system and enact systemic change.

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Appendix I: Extract from reflective diary

March 2022
Márta • Marzo • Marzec • März • Mars
Week 9

St. David's Day (Wales), Shrove Tuesday — Máirt • Martes • Wtorek • Dienstag • Mardi — Tuesday 1 (60 - 305)

Meet [redacted] after work

I think this interview was very short, I need to examine how I can 'push' for more detail.

P2 spoke very honestly and freely she is an English teacher and when she recounted her story she gave very good detail of her reasons and feelings so I didn't push for this in the same way as the interview with P1.

P2 spoke a lot about social differences and is sensitive to other peoples perceptions of her.

She didn't speak about her LC or getting into college and given the framework for interview P I couldn't ask for so it will have to wait until subsession 3.

I get the sense that both P1 and P2 found it difficult to give a monologue. Both are happy to speak freely, in my opinion, but I sense that

Priority

March 2022
Márta • Marzo • Marzec • März • Mars

Week 9

2 Wednesday Céadaoin • Miércoles • Środa • Mittwoch • Mercredi Ash Wednesday
61 - 304

they feel the stopped their stories too soon because they didn't want to be in the spotlight maybe. When I push for PIN's they continue to give very in depth answers. They have both apologized for 'rambling' and going off topic

Its interesting that my question asks to tell the story of becoming a teacher both P1 and P2 have interpreted this as why and not how. Their stories so far been more towards motivation and feelings and influences rather than practical steps.

Rereading the transcript I get the sense that at times she felt that she overshared and then she cuts herself off by saying - I'm rambling.

Do I need to push more for feelings? Wengraf focuses on them for pushing for PINS but I'm not

Priority

March 2022
Márta • Marzo • Marzec • Märż • Mars

Week 9

Déardaoin • Jueves • Czwartek • Donnerstag • Jeudi Thursday 3
62 - 303

sure if they are really relevant to the story that's being told. Maybe I have enough because the participants have been open with me.

Appendix II: BNIM interview page

NB - Record audio - confirm consent

24/2/22 P1

1. Emotional recognition of their and your emotional states (if necessary); working through / time out (if necessary)
2. Then: Push pausefully and gracefully towards narrative, push for (in) PINs (see bottom of page)
(if necessary via left-hand bundles back towards the right-hand one)

Use this magic formula (in green)+
your rightwards choice of magic word from one of the three bundles

"shall be a teacher" Grandmother

[Use Only Where Necessary] | Most Frequently | Best !!!

You said…."Do you remember any/that particular | TIME –Situation Phase EXAMPLE Period | Occasion - incident event –MOMENT – happening

XX- below (any more detail about) THEN->now

– Day

their words [any: feeling-thought-image]

particularly strongly?

How it all happened?

Sensory Scenic Reconstruction – where it all happened – "the feeling of the café" - the 'felt sense', the 'sensed feelings'; where were they standing? What was the /look/sound/ of the place?

underdog.

ROUND 2 MAGICWORDS….. ROUND 3 MAGICWORD…. ROUND N MAGICWORDS

Keep your noting with indentations (to show rounds) as per example page to stop yourself going back by mistake or missing out possibilities

caregiver
1 good adult
determined

e.g. hated going to school

(1) Access route - teacher in school → Didn't disclose family circumstances

Part time job → missed days due to work
independence
work/study/life balance
↳ Access + college

(2) expand on experience of teaching → "underdog" meaning? → How does she identify → Connect to DEIS school

Anything else → recalled moment as a 6 yr old. Vulnerable due to family events > Felt supported by teacher > fostered this approach

(in)PIN = Unique Particular Incident Narrative (partial re-living from within of a single earlier lived experiencing) Note whether you're getting it. If you don't have it, yet, push pausefully for it…. If you have it, push pausefully for more in-PIN detail (of thinking, feeling, sensing, doing)! "We were there, this particular Saturday evening…he said…she said…What I do is…I'm thinking …Then what happens is… Afterwards I remember feeling (I'm still feeling it a bit) feeling…. Now I feel a bit different, I feel… … Looking back I think it was quite a critical moment, because….I'd completely forgotten that…

Appendix III: Information and consent letter

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study.

I am Deirdre Murphy, a doctoral student in the Department of Education in Maynooth University. As part of the requirements for Doctor of Education with Specialism, I am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Dr. Joe Oyler, Maynooth University.

My research is concerned with diversity of the teaching profession, specifically in relation to entrants from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. I am researching the influence of role models on the participant's decision to become a teacher. My research will also focus on the participant's experiences of being a role model to students in designated disadvantaged school settings.

What will the study involve?

The study will involve three one-to-one interviews. The first interview will consist of an open question to invite you to talk about your life story. The second interview will follow up on the topics you have raised in the first interview. The third interview will be used to gather insights on topics which may not have already been addressed. The interviews will be audio recorded.

It is intended to conduct the interviews face to face, however this may change to virtual interviews based on HSE guidelines in relation to COVID-19. The interviews will take place between March and August 2022. I will arrange a date, time and venue that suits you, to minimise the time commitment that you are making. Following each interview, a transcript of the interview and my interpretations will be emailed to you for approval. You will also be invited to view and make clarifications to the final interpretations of the research.

Who has approved this study?

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

Why have you been asked to take part?

You have been asked because you are a post-primary school teacher from a disadvantaged socio-economic group who is teaching or has taught in a disadvantaged school setting. Your experience offers unique and valuable insights central to the purpose of the study.

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. You are invited to take part in the interviews. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are anonymised [July 31st 2023]. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with Maynooth University.

What information will be collected?

The personal information collected will include your name, email address and number of years service as a teacher. The audio recordings of your life story and subsequent interviews will be transcribed and anonymized.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential and will not be used in relation to any future professional engagements or collaborations. No names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' home, electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU PC or servers and will be accessed by myself, Deirdre Murphy, and my supervisor Dr. Joe Oyler.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all

reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'

What will happen to the information which you give?

All the information you provide will be kept at Maynooth University in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. After ten years, I will destroy all data. Manual data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten.

What will happen to the results?

The research will be written up and presented as a Doctoral thesis. The research may also be discussed at internal group meetings, presented at National and International conferences and may be published in scientific journals. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

There is a risk that participating in the interviews and reflecting on your life experiences may cause some distress. There is a possibility that old, unresolved issues may surface as participants recount their life histories.

What if there is a problem?

At the end of each interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you experience any distress following the interview, you are advised to speak to a friend or colleague. It may also be appropriate to contact additional support services, for example: Samaritans (116123) or Aware (1800804848). You may contact my supervisor, Dr. Joe Oyler, xxxxxx@mu.ie if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information, you can contact me: Deirdre Murphy, xxxxxxxxx@mumail.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Consent Form

I……………………………………agree to participate in Deirdre Murphy's research study titled The Power to make a difference: examining the experiences of teachers from working-class backgrounds in relation to role modelling.

Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me verbally and in writing. I've been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily. ☐

I am participating voluntarily. ☐

I give permission for my interview with Deirdre Murphy to be audio recorded. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data right up until such time as the research findings are anonymised [31st July 2023]. ☐

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request. ☐

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet ☐

I understand that my data, in an anonymous format, may be used in further research projects and any subsequent publications if I give permission below: ☐

Please tick one response from each of the following pairs of statements:

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

I agree for my data to be used for further research projects ☐

I do not agree for my data to be used for further research projects ☐

I agree for my data, once anonymised, to be retained indefinitely in the IQDA archive ☐

I do not agree for my data once anonymised, to be retained indefinitely in the IQDA archive ☐

Signed…………………………………. Date……………….

Participant's Name in block capitals ……………………………………………..

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed…………………………………. Date……………….

Researcher Name in block capitals ……………………………………………..

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at dataprotection@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.

Two copies to be made: 1 for participant, 1 for D. Murphy

Appendix IV: Ethical Approval

- Project Title: Ed D Research – The Power to Make a Difference: Examining the experiences of teachers from working class backgrounds

- Status: APPROVE

- Principal Investigator (PI): Deirdre Marie Murphy

- Suggested request tier / level: Tier 2

- Suggestion approval committee: Social Research Ethics Sub-Committee

- Details / Rationale: Research on diversity within the teaching profession indicates that teachers from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups experience challenges associated with belonging and identity as they cross social class boundaries. Little is known about how these issues influence the role modelling potential of teachers from disadvantaged SEGs. This research aims to draw on the narrated experiences of post-primary teachers from disadvantaged SEGs to better understand the practices and experiences of role modelling.

- Proposed Start date: 01/02/2021

- Proposed End date: 30/09/2023