

**WORKING IN A WEB OF RELATIONSHIPS:
EXPERIENCES OF SELECTED SECOND-LEVEL
TEACHERS IN IRELAND**

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PART A

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Abstract

Exploring the interlinking of the personal and professional domains in the work of teaching, the study identified at an early stage that classroom relationships are central in teaching, and that this is basis for the overlap of the personal with the professional. Thus, the research came to focus on the nature of these relationships, and their implications for teachers' lives and careers. It investigates the experiences in teaching of five second-level teachers in Ireland. It uses a constructivist, broadly narrative approach in which participants actively engaged throughout in constructing both their accounts of their careers and the findings of the study. Their accounts are presented in the thesis in the context of their personal and professional journeys. By exploring the nature of classroom interactions from the teachers' of point of view, the study brings to light perspectives on the nature of schools, education and teaching which are rarely considered in public debate in Ireland.

Two primary, linked findings emerge from the study. Firstly, that teaching takes place within a complex web of relationships, and that these form not only the context within which learning takes place, but are, in fact, an important part of the learning itself. And, secondly, the requirement of authenticity in these relationships means that the selfhood of the teacher must be centrally employed in the job of teaching; the teacher must commit personally as well as professionally to the job.

Arising from these findings, the study identifies issues of negotiation, values, struggle and resilience as central to teachers' daily experience in their work. However, it finds that such issues are rarely acknowledged either in public debate or within the profession. Furthermore, it identifies an absence among teachers of a language in which such issues can be articulated or discussed. The omission of these issues from the education debate, publicly and within the profession, provides new explanations for some of the enduring characteristics of Irish second-level schools; issues such as privatism among teachers and the difficulty of promoting sustainable cultural change in schools. It also sheds new light on why teachers are often unconvincing when describing and defending their practice in public.

Dedication

To Mari, Niamh, Shona, Orla and Denal

My best teachers

Because they have loved me

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

This study is grounded in my own experience of working with teachers in many roles for nearly forty years. It is based on my conviction that teaching is more than a just a job; that in teaching the personal and the professional domains are inextricably linked, that the teacher's emotions and personal and professional values are centrally employed, and that feeling is as important as thinking. And I believed that these issues had significant implications for teachers' lives and careers, as well as for the quality of their teaching. The study is based, furthermore, on my conviction that these important issues are not widely recognised or understood in society in general or even by teachers themselves. So, this thesis offers an account of research with second-level teachers into how they have experienced their careers. It explores teaching from the teachers' point of view and, in doing so, it sheds light on aspects of the education system which are often forgotten or ignored in the national debate.

What led me to this research?

I had worked with teachers in various roles for thirty five years; as colleague, in middle management, as principal and in a professional development support role as coordinator of the Mol an Óige project¹. I had worked in second-level and adult education, and in a number of European funded education programmes, and have worked with primary teachers, and Youthreach² and VTOS³ tutors.

I had come to the belief that for many teachers, their professional practice is experienced as inherently un-educational and oppressive and causes stress, professional isolation and a sense of powerlessness. I had seen the job become a personal as well as professional burden on some teachers whose values were not being realised in their practice. I believed that staffrooms in Ireland frequently offered teachers very little professional (as distinct from personal) support or

¹ Mol an Óige was an EU funded project (1996 – 2000) which aimed to develop and test a model of targeted interventions to empower providers (educational and others) to respond more flexibly in meeting the needs of young people at risk of failing in school, and to ensure that these young people benefited to the maximum from the services provided.

² Youthreach is a second-chance education programme for early school leavers.

³ VTOS, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme is a second-chance education programme for adults in the social welfare system.

nourishment. I believed also that many bright, enthusiastic young teachers become disillusioned, defensive and conservative by mid career, at the time when they were assuming roles in middle management, thus perpetuating current school cultures. From my experience, I concurred with Swan (1991: 22) who asserts that “our system in Ireland is inhumanly indifferent to the damage it does to some teachers, and in turn to their pupils, when some, at least, of this damage could be prevented”.

In recent years, I had found myself becoming frustrated by what seemed to me to be the imposition of management principles and practices developed for industry. I felt that many of these ideas were being accepted in education, but my arguments against them sounded unconvincing, even to my own ears. I did not have an answer to the question: ‘what makes teaching different?’

The ASTI industrial action in 2000/2001 was a traumatic event for the teaching profession in Ireland. The reaction to teachers at the time by the media, the general public, management and students, as well as the inability of teacher representatives to present their case in a manner that was convincing to the general public, has left a legacy of hurt and incomprehension among many teachers. In the debate at that time, teachers’ recourse to ‘professional status’ elicited little sympathy and, indeed, their claims to professionalism were frequently mocked and dismissed, and very many felt a sense of public humiliation.

What did I wish to find out, and why?

I believed that all of the issues above were connected in some way to the overlapping of the personal and professional domains in the work of teaching. So, in my research, I set out to explore the nature of this overlapping, why it occurs, and its implications for teachers’ lives and careers.

At an early stage, the study began to crystallise around the issue of relationships in teaching, in particular the relationships between teachers and students; their range, depth and complexity, and their importance both for teachers’ and students’ learning and well-being. The requirement of authenticity in these relationships then highlighted the centrality of the selfhood of the teacher in his or her work. These two issues, then, became focal points of the study. Later, in reflecting with my participants on how we had constructed and interpreted our accounts of our experience, we found that we were using a language with which we were not familiar

from our staffrooms. It became clear that the language in which the debate on education is usually conducted is inadequate to describe or defend teachers' practice. This, then, became a third major theme in the study.

So, in my research, I sought to explore:

1. the nature of the job of teaching as experienced and understood by teachers themselves
2. the nature of the relationships teachers form with their students, and the significance and implications of these relationships as they experienced them
3. the nature of their professional relationships with their colleagues, and of the cultures of the staffrooms in which they work – in particular, the extent to which these cultures recognise and provide support for the emotional and affective elements of teaching
4. the extent to which their own selfhood is employed in their teaching, and the extent to which this has implications for their lives and careers
5. what lessons, if any, emerge for those charged with planning changes in the education system and teacher professional development.

The national context

The legislative framework of Irish second-level education has changed significantly in recent years. Since the introduction of the Education Act (1998), other important legislation impacting on education has also been enacted, including the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999), the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), the Teaching Council Act (2001), the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) and the Disability Act (2005). In addition to the legislative framework, the success of the “Celtic Tiger” gave impetus to the neo-liberal agenda and this has impacted strongly on education and schooling: in particular, it has led to an emphasis on measurable outputs of education with correspondingly less emphasis on the affective aspects of teaching and learning, and it has also resulted in greater emphasis being placed on teacher accountability. In the process, issues like the importance of rapport in the context of learning and the complexity of the relationships within which teachers work have been forgotten or ignored.

The establishment of the Teaching Council in 2006 marked a very important landmark. The work of the council will frame the work of Irish teachers for a generation. Hence, it is vitally important for teachers to engage with it. The council published its Codes for Professional Conduct for Teachers in 2007, making “explicit the essential values which underpin the profession of teaching in Ireland” (Teaching Council, 2007: 7). This document has the potential to instigate a much needed debate on the nature and significance of teacher professionalism. However, the debate has not taken off; rather, the council, and teachers in their engagement with it, have focused most sharply on its regulatory functions, leaving underlying principles and values unexamined. I hope that this research will give impetus to a debate about what professionalism means in the context of teaching, and that it will be an important contribution to that debate.

What is the need for this research?

This research is particularly necessary for teachers, as it explores important aspects of teaching frequently overlooked. It shows that they need to find a language which will enable them to discuss and develop their practice, to articulate and scrutinise their values, to develop supportive collegial working environments, and to contribute to the national education debate. I believe the research is necessary also for all with an interest in education – government, policy-makers, managers, parents and communities at large – because all too frequently, the debate on education is hijacked to serve economic or other ideological interests with, consequently, a poorer education experience for our children. Finally, I believe that the research is important because a greater engagement by teachers in the fundamental purposes of education will result in greater nourishment for themselves and a better education for their students.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured as follows:

Part A: The Background	Chapter 1: Introduction Chapter 2: Selected themes from the literature Chapter 3: Methodology
Part B: The Findings	Introduction Chapter 4: Findings: Participants' accounts Chapter 5: A thematic view of the findings
Part C: Conclusions	Chapter 6: Implications and conclusions

Part A (which includes this introduction) addresses what the thesis is about, why it was undertaken, what has already been written about the issues, and how I went about the research.

The literature is referenced throughout the thesis, but Chapter 2 provides a selected overview of what has been written in relation to the issues which are explored. Further references to the literature are made throughout the thesis as themes emerge.

In Chapter 3, I describe how I developed a specific methodology for this research, drawing heavily on narrative enquiry, but also on action research and constructivist grounded theory; a methodology which was congruent with my epistemological and ontological positions, and also with the aims of the research. I describe how my methodology and methods were modified during the process of the research itself in order to retain and enhance this congruence. I hope also that the whole presentation of this thesis is consistent with the values which underpin the research and with the methodology adopted. The literature in relation to methodology is mostly dealt with in Chapter 3.

In Part B of the thesis, I present my findings. These are presented in two chapters, 4 and 5. In Chapter 4, I present the accounts of my participants, Ben, Cathy, Linda, Conor and Robert. In doing so, I have tried to present their experiences *in* education rather than their ideas *about* education, in order to better understand how they have become the teachers they currently are. Thus, I have used many extracts from the

conversations I had with them, and have made liberal use of their own words. I have tried, in presenting the accounts, to give a feeling for what they have experienced and how they have grown throughout their careers, and how the personal and professional domains interacted in their lives and careers.

Palmer (2000) likens the teaching career to a “pilgrimage – ‘a transformative journey to a sacred centre’ full of hardships, darkness and peril”. Each of my participants’ accounts bear evidence of this; each is unique, marked by highs and lows and ongoing struggle.

In Chapter 5, I analyse the themes emerging from my participants’ accounts, and examine the discourses which shape these accounts and themes. Issues such as the nature of teaching, isolation, struggle, relationships and the selfhood of the teacher are located in the context of Irish education discourse, and in relation to the literature.

Part C contains conclusions and recommendation. In this section I summarise my findings and reflect on their. I reflect on the methodology used and on my own engagement with the research process. In this section also, I reflect on the thesis as a whole, and acknowledge that it is partial; it is not the whole story of Irish second-level education. But it does present some important insights into aspects of the system which are either forgotten or ignored in public debate and even among teachers and ‘educationalists’ themselves; aspects whose omission has allowed a distorted view of education to gain dominance in practice in Irish second-level schooling. I hope that this study will provide the impetus for a more balanced debate in the future.

Chapter 2: SELECTED THEMES FROM THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In my research, much of my exploration of the literature proceeded simultaneously with the analysis and collection of data. This is in line with grounded theory⁴ which informed the methodology chosen for the study. This approach meant that the research was led by the contributions from participants rather than by the literature; the latter was used to seek explanations and context for the former, rather than the other way around. However, in this early chapter in the thesis, I present selected themes from the literature in order to set the context for the research, to heighten sensitivity to issues emerging in the findings, and to facilitate critical evaluation of my findings and conclusions. Later in the thesis, where findings emerge, specific references will be made to the literature; this applies in particular in Chapter 5.

Most of the literature relating to methodology is left until Chapter 3 where it will be interwoven with my discussion and description of the research methodology and methods which I use in the study.

In this chapter, I explore the literature under five broad headings:

1. The nature of schooling
2. The nature of teaching
3. Discourses surrounding teaching and schooling
4. The centrality of the selfhood of the teacher
5. The nature of professionalism in teaching

⁴ Grounded theory is a research methodology in which the process of data collection and analysis is inductive in nature, where the researcher does not begin with pre-conceived ideas to prove or disprove, and where issues of importance emerge and can be theorised. This is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 3.

The nature of schooling

The processes of schooling and education are often confused with each other. In Ireland, we talk about the 'education system' when what we often mean is the schooling system. The assumption that education is best delivered in the school setting underpins much of the legislation of the past decade (e.g., the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000; the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004). But schooling and education are not the same thing. Schooling concerns itself with socialisation, selection, protection and safety, as well as education; the implications of these concerns for kinds of the education 'delivered' by formal schooling, and the way in which it is delivered, are far-reaching but rarely considered.

Socialisation

Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1999) say that "in western societies, schools (especially high schools) act as the segregating and custodial institutions where the rite of passage from early childhood to adulthood takes place" (p. 106). Schools are expected to isolate adolescents in much the same way that formal rituals of passage do in traditional societies. They take a rather jaundiced view of schooling, saying that "nowhere else is such a large group of noncriminals forced to remain in an institution for so long" (p. 128). So socialisation is a central part of students' learning in schools.

Social constructivist writers, for example, Vygotsky (2004), Jaramillo (1996), suggest that learning becomes knowledge by being socially negotiated. Thus, in classroom, students learn through interacting with peers, teachers, manipulatives, and their contextual setting. Teachers act as facilitators of what and how students learn.

Rogers (2003) says:

Students (in the classroom) are learning a great deal through acquisition as well as formalised learning. Much is being learned from peer students and from persons other than the teacher ... this is the socialisation that goes on at school (socialisation is, of course learning). (p. 28)

He adds that students learn also from the relationship with the teacher, from the way the teacher handles him or herself, from the class and from individuals within the class. Thus, teachers must model the ideals and values they wish to pass on and must create a setting in which these values can be acquired.

One of the by-products of the system of schooling, particularly at second-level⁵, is the growth of a 'youth culture'. Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1999) argue that by forcing large numbers of young people into such close proximity for long periods of time, schools have become incubators of peer groups within a wider youth culture. These peer groups play an important part in the socialisation of young people. Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte identify three main characteristics of this culture. Firstly, conformity: young people growing up do not want to be too different from friends. Part of the herd instinct that influences young people involves role-modelling and trying on different identities exemplified by their friends or significant adult figures. Another part involves learning the norms and values of a group and trying to stay within them. Secondly, rebellion: rebellion against adult symbols of authority is an important component of growing up in contemporary societies. The actual content and direction of student rebellion is hard to characterise other than that it is in opposition to whatever strong adult presence, whether parental or institutional, is prominent in the lives of young people. And thirdly, idealism: idealism is a desire to transform the world and make it a better place; it is a tendency to simplify problems and look for unambiguous solutions; it is a necessary stage in the development of a young person's personal philosophy. While it allows them to be brave and capable of action on issues that adults might hesitate to tackle, it also makes them prey to outrage and despair when solutions are delayed. Their belief in immortality, invincibility and high ideals permits young people to feel that they cannot be harmed by actions that would endanger most people.

The longer a society schools its children, the greater will be the tendency for them to develop a youth culture that is in opposition to adults. So schooling, by its nature, produces peer groups; individual and group identities are created within these and in opposition to adults. This has the important implication for teachers that part of their role is to be the adult in opposition to whom students, in part, develop their own identities.

For students, the choices are acceptance, negotiation or resistance. Acceptance involves the internalisation of the school's promise that academic and educational longevity will pay off. Negotiation involves a recognition that, while the payoffs for completing school may not be monumental, the consequences of not doing so are worse. Such students will work hard enough and conform sufficiently to the rules to

⁵ I define second-level for the purposes of this study as mainstream schools teaching approx 12 – 19 year olds and preparing for Junior and Leaving Certificate.

pass the exams. Resisters do not wish to negotiate on the school's terms. "Resistance ... involves 'withholding assent' from school authorities ... they become resisters when their disagreement is actively expressed" (Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999: 138). Resistance is sometimes necessary and beneficial for students; sometimes it can "serve to salvage the self-esteem or reputation of the individual engaging in it" (p. 138). They add, however, that "schools consistently try to avoid, simplify, or deny the existence of resistance" (p. 138).

So, socialisation is a very major part of schooling for students and teachers, and is one which teachers must facilitate and which takes a lot of their energy.

Selection

Bourdieu (e.g., 1994, 1999) believes that schools have replaced the church as the major agency for socialisation and legitimation in modern society. Much of his writing is devoted to exposing ways in which the schooling perpetuates privilege. According to van Zanten (2005), Bourdieu identifies the use of language, symbolism and credentialism as ways in which schools sustain social privilege, while at the same time appearing neutral and egalitarian. The ability of schools to confer credentials is the source of their greatest power of selection.

Although the basis for credential conferring makes it appear a fair process of technical selection, credentials in fact validate a long series of acts of social segregation and aggregation in school contexts, as well as multiple ways of matching school requirements with class distinctions. (van Zanten, 2005: 673)

Though Irish second-level schools do not confer credentials on students, the very high importance attached to their role in preparing students for the Leaving Certificate and the 'points system'⁶, and the prominence that these hold in Irish society suggests that the contention applies equally to the Irish situation.

Broccolichi & Cœuvrard (1999) claim the movement in France towards uniformity in the education system has resulted in the "unequal distribution of the most culturally disadvantaged students", creating greater inequalities between schools. A similar process is evident in Ireland with an increasing number of students attending new private schools, which have become known pejoratively as "grind" schools. (Sugrue, 2004). This is another form of selection.

⁶ In Ireland, results in the Leaving Certificate, which is the terminal examination at second-level are aggregated and given a numerical "points" value up to maximum of 600. The "points score" which a student obtains determines which third-level courses s/he can access.

Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1999: 130) state that “an insidious characteristic of ability groups is that they construct failure”; no matter how high the achievement of the lowest group, the children in it will feel like “dummies”. This is another way in which selection occurs in schools.

The requirement of selection impacts on teachers. It frames the context within which they work and it must be accommodated within (or even outside of) their personal and professional values; it impacts on the kinds of relationships which are possible within the classroom, and it strongly influences how teachers are evaluated, and how they judge each other.

Protection & safety

Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1999) suggest that students, particularly in second-level school, are held in protective custody and economic dependence. They say students are often thought to be in need of protection, and may pose a danger to others because they do not know the rules governing their new state in society.

In practice this is seen in the health & safety legislation which requires teachers to ensure a safe environment for their students. It is also seen in child protection guidelines and in the requirements on teachers to intervene in the peer group to identify and prevent bullying.

O Sullivan (2005: 171) shows how concerns about health, safety and welfare pervade thinking about education, even to the extent that “trust in the pedagogical relationship is dissipated”.

Education

Chapter 1 of the White Paper on Education (Government of Ireland, 1995) is entitled “Philosophical Rationale for Educational Policy and Practice”. It is wide ranging, and says that the State’s concern in education is to promote quality, equality, pluralism, partnership and accountability, and it elaborates on these. It says that the state seeks to protect and promote human and civil rights; to nurture the holistic development of the individual and promote the social and economic welfare of society; and to empower individual schools, colleges and partners to nurture and promote their own particular values, tradition and character. Elaborating on these, it recognises that education is a right for each individual, that it is a critical source of economic and social well-being, that it supports human development and that it prepares people for full participation in cultural, social and economic life. It asserts that “students are

entitled to the highest possible standard of teaching” (p. 7), and that the state should promote and ensure the highest standard of education and learning for all. This requires attention to “the quality of the curriculum, teaching and assessment and the quality of teachers in schools, school and institutional management, and planning processes” (p. 7-8). It does not mention relationships in the classroom in this list. It says that because education is so central in individual and social development, that evaluating the effectiveness of educational policy, provision and outcomes is important. And it refers to accountability on the one hand to parents, students and the wider community, and on the other to the national and regional authorities. Recognising parents’ rights, it begins: “although most parents avail of formal schooling for their children ...” (p. 8). This is the only recognition in the document that alternative models of education to “formal schooling” are possible. The only reference in the chapter to teachers’ personal professional values is a rather negative one: “where the values and beliefs for teachers conflict with parents’ rights to choose their children’s moral and spiritual upbringing, the education system should decide in favour of the parents” (p. 9).

So, this is the official philosophical rationale for education policy and practice in Ireland. And, while it presents many laudable aims, it fundamentally conflates education and schooling. Nowhere, other than as mentioned, does it acknowledge that schooling is just one model of education provision, nor does it examine what other effects confining so many young people in such close proximity for such long periods can have; for them or for their teachers. It fails to acknowledge the centrality of rapport in the process of teaching and learning, and of the complexity of relationships in the context of “formal schooling”. This further suggests a distinct undervaluing of the affective elements of education. While the document supports the rights of providers to nurture and promote their own individual values, it represents teachers’ personal values and beliefs as problematic, something to be subordinated. This encourages within schools what Palmer (2007: 17) describes as “an academic culture that distrusts personal truth, (where) the self is not a source to be tapped but a danger to be suppressed”.

In the section on the teaching profession, the Paper discusses pre- and in-service education for teacher. It calls for “the maintenance of a mutually reinforcing balance between the personal and professional development of students” in second-level pre-service education (p. 124). In the section dealing with in-career professional development, however, it makes no mention of personal development, nor does it make any reference to the fact that teaching draws heavily on the teacher’s

personality (see p. 29 of this thesis), nor to the centrality of relationship in teaching. Its approach is illustrated when it says that “the identification of students with learning difficulties and special needs requires programmes to enable teachers to assist all students fulfil their potential” (p. 130). It may be the intention of such programmes to help teachers to establish and maintain nourishing relationships with such students in the context of the classroom pressures but, if so, it was not considered worthy of mention; the focus is on ‘programmes’. The view of in-career professional development as programmes rather than as everyday professional nourishment is not mentioned. Collegiality is mentioned in the Paper in the context of programme planning and delivery, but not in the context of creating working environments which could provide support and nourishment for teachers in sustaining authentic relationships as well as in their everyday professional development.

It is evident from a reading of the White Paper that it seeks to balance many contradictory (though legitimate) interests in schooling. In doing so, consideration of the *process* of education, particularly its affective aspects, becomes subordinated to more measurable considerations such as *provision, management* and *forms of accountability*. In the process, the view of education itself becomes distorted.

The nature of teaching

Busy

Classroom teaching at second-level is an all-action occupation (e.g., van Manen, 1995; Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). It is recognised as such by teachers themselves. In my work with the Mol an Óige project (Mol an Óige 2000a), I found that many teachers regarded their real work as what they did in the classroom, and that teachers who worked mainly outside the classroom were frequently viewed as having it easy; as, somehow, not pulling their weight. The literature provides evidence for this also. van Manen (1995) says:

Life in classrooms is contingent, dynamic, ever-changing: every moment, every second is situation specific. Moments of teaching are ongoing incidents that require instant action”. (p. 40).

Elsewhere, he refers to a quality of “engaged immediacy” in the job of teaching which he identifies as a main contributor to the “common phenomenon of teacher fatigue and enervation” (p. 35).

Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1999) agree, saying that the school day is characterised by high rates of interaction and frequent changes in activities. Changes in who talks, between teacher and students, can occur up to 1,000 times daily; teachers themselves initiate as many as 80 interchanges per hour with students. “At best, the teacher ends the day with sensory overload” (p. 167). Christin (1999a) gives a graphic account of the range and intensity of issues with which a teacher in a particular class has to deal. Gleeson (2004: 126) says that “overload is one of the most recurring problems” in Irish classrooms.

Nias (1996) argues that the work of many teachers is unique in that it involves intensive personal interactions, often in crowded conditions, with large numbers of pupils who are frequently energetic, spontaneous, immature and preoccupied with their own interests. “Moreover, the social context of teachers’ work requires them to demonstrate a capacity to control this effervescent mixture and to direct it into culturally approved channels” (p. 2).

In my experience, not many people other than teachers recognise the intensity of the job or the importance of the decisions that teachers make. There seems to be a general attitude that, even if the interactions are intense, the decisions which teachers have to make all day long are of a lower order of importance or significance than other professionals – they are not life or death. Yet, it is well recorded that many adults claim to have suffered serious and long-lasting hurt which has affected their lives because of their perceived treatment by a teacher during their time in school (e.g. Meehan, 2000, p.51)

Teachers’ personal practical knowledge

An essential requirement of teaching is that it be authentic. Marshall & Ball (1999) say that being authentic means teaching with an “emotional heart” (p. 84). van Manen (1995) says that teaching is not only governed by principles of effectiveness, but also by special normative, affective and ethical considerations.

The teacher teaches with the head and the heart, and must *feelingly know* what is the appropriate thing to do in ever changing circumstances with children who are organised in groups, but who are also unique as individuals. (p. 33, *his emphasis*)

He recognises that every moment in the classroom is situation specific, requiring instant action. He refers to a quality of engaged immediacy as being central to teaching. Teachers do not have the luxury of time for thinking or reflecting when taking decisions; to be authentic, teachers must act with a spontaneous fluency of action, which is in itself a kind of situated practical knowledge. He refers to this knowledge as *pedagogical tact*. This tact cannot be reduced to some set of skills that mediates between theory and practice. He proposes that it “possesses its own epistemological structure that manifests itself first of all as a certain kind of acting: an active intentional consciousness of thoughtful human interaction” (p. 43). The tact he speaks of is a moral concern; the teacher is tactful for the good of the student. In this way it differs from diplomacy, etiquette etc. which serve other interests. It is very similar to what Clandinin & Connelly (2000) call *personal practical knowledge*, but with van Manen emphasising its ethical dimension.

Atkinson & Claxton (2000) explore the role of intuition and reflection in teaching. Like van Manen, they recognise that teachers’ decisions are necessarily based on very limited conscious examination of the various options available. They caution against interpreting reflection solely in terms of articulation, to the exclusion of other forms of reflection which are more bodily, sensory, affective, or aesthetic, i.e., intuitive, and they argue that it is not always necessary to be able to articulate one’s knowledge in order for it to be valid. They identify three main thinking processes which underpin teaching:

... the intuitive thinking that underlies action and rapid decision making, the analytical and objective thinking that allows teachers to plan for learning, and the analytical and the reflective thinking that is crucial to monitoring and learning from experience. (p. 6)

Furlong (2000) suggests that teachers need to engage with these different forms of thinking. “It is through using each to critique the other that individuals are able to reach their own conclusions as to what constitutes sound professional practice” (p. 23). He goes on to suggest, however, that, no matter how much professionals themselves believe that writers such as Schön accurately describe the complexities of their daily lives, when it comes to arguing against ever more invasive centralised control, the argument that professional knowledge is essentially personal and practical has not proved very convincing to a wider public. Perhaps one reason for this is that it is interpreted (and perhaps sometimes consciously used) as a means of evading accountability (see p. 22). Another possible reason lies in the use of language itself (see p. 27).

Staff culture

My experience led me to believe that teachers often do not receive the kinds of professional support and nourishment that they require. Furthermore, I believed that this support and nourishment should come primarily from colleagues within school staffs. Hence I sought in this study to examine what I termed staffroom culture (which includes all the types of interactions that take place between members of a school staff).

There is much evidence in the literature of the isolation and privatism of teachers (e.g., Lortie, 1975; Hargreaves, 1994 & 2000). Hargreaves (2000) lists as causes the “egg-crate” structure of schooling, the impossibility for many teachers of imagining anything different, and anxiety and self-doubt about competence, whose flaws would be exposed by observation and inspection. It is a sad fact noted, for example by Swan (1991) that many Irish teachers go through their whole career without ever seeing another teacher teaching. And, this isolation spills over to the staffroom also where the sharing of experience and skills which would be supportive for teachers does not always take place (e.g., Mol an Óige: 2000a). Jeffers (2006), engaged in a study which had many similarities with the Mol an Óige project, found:

teacher isolation inhibits feedback and fails to affirm those who engage in good teaching; it also greatly reduced the possibility of meaningful support to those who may need it most. (p. 196)

In his study, pairs of experienced teachers agreed to visit each others’ classrooms and to share experience. Jeffers talks of “the slow development of questioning of practice and underlying assumptions and the almost total absence of criticism” (p. 195) in the early conversations, and how these became more frank and robust as participants’ confidence in the process grew. Participants found that the project provided “a welcome, different kind of discourse complementing the more urgent and immediate everyday concerns of a normal school day” (p. 197). Discussions focused on common features of ‘good teaching’, and there was a growing recognition of the value of critical reflection.

Teacher isolation is most unhealthy. Hargreaves (2000) lists the effects of privatism and isolation, and concludes that, ironically, “isolation does not create a kaleidoscope of individuality and iconoclastic eccentricity in teachers’ classes, but a dull routine and homogeneity” (p. 160-161). While I will argue that the selfhood of the teacher is central to the teaching process, I will also argue that to recognise this is not to promote privatism; on the contrary, recognising the centrality of selfhood increases

the urgency for personal and professional nourishment, which can only come through real collaboration.

Establishing collaborative cultures among staff is widely recommended in the literature (e.g., Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996, Hargreaves, 1994, 2000, 2002, Jeffers, 2006, Codd, 2005, Nias, 1996). Hargreaves (2000) says that there is increasing evidence that cultures of collaboration can lead to improvements in teaching and learning, as well as in the implementation of change. The writers referred to suggest that such collaborative cultures encourage teachers to take risks which individual teachers' are not in a position to take because of feelings of vulnerability. And they can lead to genuine learning communities. Day (2004) also refers to "collaboration and inclusivity" as essential to building and sustaining schools as learning communities (p. 426). Hargreaves (2002) says that benefits for teachers from real collaboration include increased satisfaction, increased moral support and lessened feelings of guilt and inadequacy, lowered stress levels, enhanced capacity to cope with change and improvements in student achievement.

The literature makes a number of suggestions for developing collegiality a theme I return to on page 141.

Relationships

While many authors to the importance of relationships between teachers and students, only a few (e.g., Palmer, 2007; Moskvina, 2006; Noddings 2002; Ryan, McCormack & Ryan, 2004; and Nias, 1996; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996) explore the implications of this for teachers' lives and careers, or for the very nature of education itself.

There is nowhere in the literature where it says that teachers' relationships with students are not important in teaching. It is in a lack of emphasis or in omission of mention that differences of approach can be inferred. This is very noticeable in official policy documents relating to education in Ireland. For example, in legislation relating to education such as the Education Act (1998) or the Education Welfare Act (2000) there is no mention of relationships between teachers and students. While this might be expected in such documents, the omission of reference to such relationships in the rationale for educational policy and practice in the White Paper on Education (Government of Ireland, 1995) is significant. Likewise, in their report

to the Teaching Council, Conway *et al* (2009: xiv) lists ten challenges⁷ for the education system without making any reference to relationships within the classroom. These official documents reflect the fact that they attempt to balance competing ideological pressures on the schooling system (e.g., social efficiency, social justice, economic benefit). Unfortunately, most of these pressures can only be assuaged by reference to measurable outputs, and the affective aspects of education become undervalued as a result.

Complexity and range of relationships

As already suggested above by van Manen and others, teaching takes place within relationships. Teachers must form relationships with their classes, with individuals within classes, with individuals and groups outside the classroom, and they must also mediate relationships between students in their peer groups.

Noddings (1992) says that “students will do things for people they like and trust ... they listen to people who matter to them and to whom they matter” (p. 36). Relationship precedes learning; caring relationships can prepare children for an initial receptivity to all sorts of experiences and subject matters. Noting that researchers trying to determine whether one method of instruction is better than another often try to strip away the special qualities of teachers and students so that the various settings in which methods are being tried can be regarded as comparable, she argues that “teachers are not interchangeable; they cannot be treated as delivery systems ... nor are children interchangeable. One impish grin in the middle of a lesson can change what follows” (p. 8). Thus, teaching relationships are unique to the particular teacher. This is something to be valued, not to be resisted.

Sikes (1999), exploring the effects of parenthood on teachers lives, also talks about the “intensely personal and relationship-based nature of the work” of the teacher (p. 108). She says that teaching can be seen as a profession with a gendered and familial nature: “with women as mother teachers nurturing and caring; and men as fathers, disciplining and wielding power”. She remarks:

That schools and schooling have come to be socially constructed and perceived in this way is ironic, given the way in which teachers’ experiences of parenting and the skills

⁷ The document refers to challenges in relation to achievement gaps, transfer of problem-solving skills, promoting inclusion, extending lifelong learning opportunities, promoting higher-Order thinking, new models of teaching and assessment, system shortcomings, integration of new technologies, working within societal changes, and the role of the school in a knowledge society.

and knowledge that can accrue from being a parent are officially, at best, unacknowledged and, at worst, denigrated. (p. 112)

Recognising that we all have multiple identities, multiples selves, Rogers (2003: 58) says that “teaching consists of a series of relationships between various identities”; a meeting of selves. Ryan *et al* (2004) emphasise the supportive context of classroom relationships.

(They) can allow learners to acknowledge aspects of themselves and interpretations of their experience that had previously been unacknowledged, and thereby reproduced unchanged. This process facilitates the construction of new self-understandings and new identities or dimensions of their subjectivities. Learners have the possibility of trying out these identities in the safety of the group context, before taking them into the wider social arena. (p. 60)

While they were writing in the context of adult education, their contention that supportive relationships facilitate personal development is equally applicable at second-level. Bourdieu (1994) echoes this:

The teaching relationship offers students values which are a major source of personal security, and provides a platform not only for their professional futures and social success, but for the esteem in which they are held by others and for their own self esteem. (p. 12)

The overlooking of relationships in official Irish policy documents is recognised by Lynch (2002) who says that relationships are one of the four dimensions of equality in education, and says that in schools this domain is neglected. She argues that education has to take seriously the need to provide students and teachers with ample prospects for relations of love, care and solidarity.

Teachers’ relationships with students, however, while being at the core of their work and providing the greatest source of joy in their work (e.g., Hargreaves, 1999), are fraught with tensions for teachers, whether in everyday classroom management or in overt conflict situations. Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1999) describe how teaching is contingent upon the goodwill of students. Teachers cannot just enter a classroom and begin to teach. They must achieve a minimum level of order as well as an agreement by the students to internalise what the teacher presents. The rules for this agreement constitute a ‘hidden curriculum’. Students have expectations of teachers: that they will be fair, keep order, explain things well, not be boring.

These role expectations constitute an unwritten contract, violation of which precipitates student retaliation. Teachers maintain control only by balancing personal forcefulness with intimate teacher-pupil relationships. (p. 169)

This is echoed by Ryan *et al.* (2004) who say that “the teacher draws on her/his personal identity in the relationship that exists with students”. (p. 57)

Nias (1996: 2) argues that human relationships are not simply central to teachers’ daily experience:

They can also become ends in themselves. There is an expectation in many schools that the relationships developed in them will be part of children’s learning.

Noddings (1992) focuses on the caring role of the teacher. She says caring is personal. It cannot be achieved by formula. In a caring relationship, both parties must contribute in characteristic ways; the carer by “engrossment” and the cared for by showing that the caring has been received. So, response from the cared for is an essential part of a caring relationship. Just as a mother suffers great loss when a child is unable to respond, so “teachers, too, suffer this dreadful loss of energy when their students do not respond” (p. 15-17). Nias, (1996: 4) adds that “secondary schools offer few material or status rewards to ‘caring’ staff, yet teachers continue to feel deeply and unresentfully attached to a caring ethic”.

Hargreaves (1999) observes that second-level classrooms are often devoid of emotional intensity, and he notes that many second-level teachers become involved in extra-curricular activities where it is possible to form relationships of a kind difficult to create in the classroom situation.

In summary, there is acknowledgement in the literature that the relationships which teachers form with students are varied, and can be extremely intense. They can be a source of great joy and satisfaction for teachers, but they may also involve conflict. Second-level teachers can be cast in the role of adult, in rebellion against whom young people develop their own identities. Thus teaching relationships draw hugely on the teacher’s personal identity. This, however, is not universally recognised in the literature, particularly in the official documentation which regulates practice in Irish second-level schools.

Emotion in teaching

Hargreaves speaks of emotion in much of his writing. In *Emotional Geographies of Teachers* (2001), he says that teaching and learning are not only concerned with knowledge, cognition and skill. They are also emotional practices. He says that people in different occupations have recurring emotional experiences characteristic of that occupation which affect their identities and their relationships with clients in distinctive ways. “Each occupation and its culture has different emotional

expectations, contours, and effects on workers and their clients. Teaching is no exception” (p. 1057). A central concept in his paper is that teaching as an occupation provides a kind of emotional landscape, the contours of which shape in large measure the emotional experiences of teachers. One feature of second-level schools in Ireland which impacts on the emotional landscape for teachers (and students) is the subject-based division of knowledge which forms the basis for the teacher/student relationship. A second feature, consequent on the first, is the belief that learning can be measured and given a numerical value; this belief underpins the ‘points system’ which is so influential over what happens in Irish second-level schools. Thus, teachers’ relationships with their students are based largely on subject expertise; this influences the emotional approach teachers and students adopt to each other. Recognising how teachers’ emotions are embedded in the conditions and interactions of their work enables us to see that emotional understanding in teaching is achieved not just by acts of personal will, sensitivity or virtue, nor is it simply a result of emotional competence. Similarly, emotional misunderstanding arises not just because of personal flaws or deficiencies in empathy or other emotional competences. “Rather, as Denzin (1984) argues, emotional misunderstanding is a pervasive and chronic feature of everyday interactions where human engagements are not based on the kind of shared experience that fosters close and common understanding” (Hargreaves, 2001: 1060).

Emotions in teaching, then, are not just a personal matter; they are also bound up with people’s experience of power and powerlessness. “Teaching, in this sense, is rife with emotional politics” (Hargreaves, 2001: 1072). For example, speaking about relationships with parents he suggests that the site of power is often unclear, uncertain and contested. As a result, interactions with parents can provoke fear, anger, anxiety and other negative emotions in teachers. This is equally true for relationships in the classroom; I have come across very many instances in my career where teachers felt powerless to deal with certain situations with which they were confronted.

Ryan *et al.* (2004), speaking about their findings in relation to adult education counselling tutors say:

Individual tutoring actions can thus be understood only in the context of and in relation to a larger whole. This whole is present in the tutor’s mind, even as s/he appears to attend to a single aspect of the class, what we have called relations in the present. Whole-person tutoring and learning involve balancing multiple ways of knowing: emotional, experiential, cognitive, theoretical, spiritual, action-oriented,

skills-based, imaginal, creative, intuitive and so on. Each element of knowing must be in balance with the others. (p. 58)

Values in teaching

Many authors (e.g., Furlong, 2000; Ruth, 2006; Bottery & Barnett, 1996; Goodson, 2004) highlight the fact that teachers' personal professional values are central to their work. Nias (1996) states:

Teachers also experience self esteem when they feel that they are acting consistently with their beliefs and values ... (they) do not feel good about themselves if they are acting, albeit under pressure, in ways which run counter to these values (p. 4).

Hargreaves (2001: 1074) says that the "emotional labour" which teachers invest in their work can lead to competence and fulfilment when people can act in accordance with their own values, can identify with the expectations of the role, and are in tune with the emotions required of it. It is damaging, however, if they are obliged to sacrifice their values or do not identify with the job and its purposes.

As in the case of relationships, however, the importance of teachers' own personal, professional values in their work is not mirrored in the official literature. I have already referred to the White Paper on Education (Ireland, Government of, 1995) where the values referred to are the values of society, and where the values of teachers are seen as problematic. For the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2009), values are what it wishes to see passed on to students:

The values underpinning senior cycle, if reflected in the experience of senior cycle, should have an impact on the formation of the young person's own values.

The Teaching Council (2007: 18, 19) presents values "which underpin the teaching profession". However, the link between these and teachers' professional beliefs and personal missions is simply assumed. This is the link that is so important, but can be so difficult to make.

Discourses surrounding teaching and schooling

The cultural and political context in Irish second-level education

Discussing the cultural and political context of Irish second-level curriculum, Gleeson (2004) states that "adherence to the dogma of 'human capital formation' theory has been an extremely important factor in the legitimization of Irish education policy since

the 1960s" (p. 120). This, he says, has resulted in a technocratic perspective on education where innovation is directed at a passive teaching force, its main concern being economic and its primary value being efficiency; where abstract knowledge is packaged as subjects that contain unquestioned truths; where curriculum documents are elevated to a status above that of classroom practice; where centralised examinations dominate rather than serve pupil learning. Thus, "the Irish system displays all the characteristics of a system where technical rather than practical or emancipatory interests are dominant" Gleeson (2004: 110). This is reflected in the dominant discourses about education which focus on technical and political issues such as range of subjects, modes and techniques of assessment, take-up of science subjects, even, in 2008, the Leaving Certificate timetable. To teachers, these discourses portray a world of measurement, clarity, results. Thus, in Irish education policy and debate, there has been little attention given to pedagogy, or the affective aspects of teaching and learning. In such a context, O Sullivan (2005) says that efforts by teachers to highlight the importance of these issues are easily marginalised. He adds:

Teachers who might express the view, for instance, that specific proposals for change, derived from the commercial world are inappropriate where educational relationships and contexts are involved are often materially repositioned and culturally resignified as problems themselves – fearing change, unadaptable, resisting modernisation, etc.

Another response is to blame teachers for being unable to treat social ills that no-one knows how to treat (palmer, 2007). Here one can see competing and antagonistic discourses surrounding education; one, a subordinate discourse of authenticity about the meaning of teaching and learning, the other dominant discourse about economic utility of education. In such situations, as Clandinin & Connelly (2000: 29) say, communicating with people using the other discourse can be like speaking with "people who are out of focus; not quite able to speak clearly; and who render ideas, thoughts, and suggestions that somehow miss the mark". The language permissible and its meanings are shaped by the assumptions underpinning the discourse. Thus, for example, the language of emotion, of uncertainty, of values, finds little expression within the dominant discourse. Even when it is expressed, it is often done in a way that fails to resonate with the experienced reality of classroom life, as, for example, with the explication of the values underpinning teacher professionalism by the Teaching Council (see p. 152).

In the face of such a dominant discourse, teachers have failed to find an authentic voice. This was particularly evident during the ASTI industrial action of 2000/2001 which, O Sullivan (2005: 171) says:

demonstrated, in the responses of the public and media, the dominance of a mercantile interpretation of teachers and teaching in terms of their functions, obligations, reward and motivation, and governability.

Gleeson (2004: 120) notes that, in the face of such an overwhelming discourse, “students and teachers have become increasingly utilitarian in their attitudes to knowledge”. Thus, for many teachers, the legitimacy and success of their teaching in the eyes of the media, parents and students derives from their ability to deliver good examination results. However, there is evidence that “teachers deviate from their own professional beliefs in the face of examination pressures” (CORI, 1998: 10), and this is referred to by all participants in this study.

Even though teachers are strongly represented on statutory bodies (such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, and the Teaching Council), Granville (2004) has shown that the *representative* as distinct from *participative* democratic structure of such bodies means the everyday issues of Irish teachers do not emerge. This is echoed by Gleeson (2004). He quotes from an interview with White, Assistant General secretary of ASTI who acknowledged that the close partnership relations between employers and unions at national level does not transfer to grassroots level, no matter how hard the union tries.

The problem is teachers are very practical people and they concentrate on doing their job, getting good exam results, they only become aware of changes when someone tells them. (p. 18)

This comment, made by a teachers’ representative, also betrays how the language of rationality pervades the education debate in that it conflates teachers ‘concentrat(ing) on doing their job’ with ‘getting good exam results’.

Trust and Accountability

I have written above (p. 18) about trust in the classroom. However, trust of teachers by society and managers is also important, and it is upon this trust that forms of accountability are designed.

Simkins (2003) defines two kinds of power in the education system. *Criteria power* is the power to define the aims and purpose of a service, to design the overall framework within which it is delivered, and to set the performance criteria which providers must satisfy. *Operational power* is the ability of the stakeholder to provide the service within the terms of the framework provided. He describes accountability thus:

In its pure form accountability of party A to party B requires three things: first, an expectation that A will act in ways consistent with the legitimate requirements of B; secondly that A will render some form of account to B; and, thirdly, that B may exercise sanctions over A if A fails to conform with B's expectations. (p. 218)

This is a “hard” form of accountability. Where there are few sanctions available, accountability is of a “soft” form. He describes various models of accountability, and says that the professional model of accountability which assumes that the “professional ethic” of teachers will lead them to act always in the best interests of clients, came to be viewed from the 1980s onwards as so ‘soft’ as to be tantamount to absence of accountability. Responses have been various, including increased legislation and regulation, the introduction of competition into the “education market”, and the simultaneous centralising and decentralising of power, centralising criteria power and decentralising operational power. Furlong (2000: 20) concurs, describing a more devolved system of education, with greater institutional autonomy and parental choice, with “increased powers of surveillance on the part of central government”. The focus on school performance has also seen a growing emphasis on management and leadership, and a rise in managerialism at the expense of teaching. Sachs (2003: 26) describes how managerialism places teachers “in a long line of authority in terms of their accountability for reaching measurable outcomes”, stretching through the principal, to the board of management, to the Department of Education and Science. Codd (2005) says that in this process, trust in teachers has been undermined; they have been depicted as being “motivated by self-interest, with propensities for opportunism and ‘provider capture’⁸” (p. 195), and their efforts to resist these ideological forces have only served to confirm underlying neo-liberal assumptions and to strengthen the political demands for increased accountability. He calls for a restoration of a culture of trust in education, but says that this requires a form of accountability in which the moral agency of the professional is fully acknowledged. “This implies an internal (high trust) form of accountability that differs significantly from the external (low trust) form of accountability that belongs within the various discourses of managerialism” (p. 203). Conway *et al* (2009: xxvi) concur, saying that “a ‘high stakes’ approach to accountability of teacher performance in the Irish context would be wholly inappropriate and counter-productive”.

We must accept the need for accountability. Sachs (2003) says that, “given the increasing regimes of accountability and verification that affect all people working in

⁸ This term refers to the phenomenon of services becoming conceptualised and organised with the interests of providers rather than users uppermost.

the professions, it is no longer useful to place accountability and autonomy in opposition” (p. 9). This is agreed also by, for example, Furlong (2000), Marshall & Ball (1999), Hargreaves (2000) and Day (2004). The issues now surround what forms systems of accountability should take, who oversees their application and what are the consequences if transgression is seen to happen. Referring to different concepts of accountability, Simkins (2003) says that “such concepts are never fully resolved because they embody competing concepts of legitimacy within any area of public service” (p. 230). What is required is to find forms which will both engender public trust and enhance education.

Effects of accountability on teachers

Sachs (2003: 26) says that managerial discourses make two distinct claims: that efficient management can solve any problem, and that practices which are appropriate for the conduct of private sector enterprises can also be applied to the public sector. However, there is evidence from the literature that forms of accountability which are appropriate to manufacturing industry are not necessarily appropriate for schools. Conway *et al* (2009), in a cross-national review of teacher education policies in nine countries, state that in those countries which have adopted “high stakes accountability mechanisms ... teacher morale has typically dropped, and this has had a significant negative impact on teaching and learning”. Hargreaves (2000) refers to “administration by performance management” (p. 169), and argues that this does not benefit either teachers or students. Hogan (2003) speaks of the trend towards:

... more elaborated ‘performance indicators’ and operationally defined ‘competencies’, to the neglect of more adequate and discerning appraisals of pertinent achievements. (p. 215)

He fears such legalistic and adversarial forms of accountability will not inspire teachers to a commitment of heart and mind.

Marshall & Ball (1999) say that “control in education has shifted from a primary emphasis on professional decision-making to a primary emphasis on accountability, from ‘self’ to ‘system’ ” (p. 74). Increasingly, it would appear that the teachers’ energies, physical and emotional, must be invested not in the work of teaching itself but in accounting for the work of teaching. They quote one teacher in their study:

With the Head, if he hears there’s something good, he wants it written up and ... you know! Oh no! – you know? Leave me alone, just let me do something without having to write about it and put it in writing! (p.82)

So, they identify a sense in which teaching is no longer worthwhile, no longer valid in its own right, no longer quite real until it is accounted for. And they add that in its new representation it may not be real at all. In this situation, teachers feel a sense of loss and alienation.

Ball (1997) refers to what Lyotard (1979) calls “the law of contradiction”, saying that

Increasing precision of application, collection and collation of indicators of performance requires greater and greater time which must be diverted away from the activities the indicators are supposed to represent.

So, it is urgent to find forms of accountability which will enhance the quality of teaching *and* engender public confidence. However, the claims to legitimacy which underpin competing forms of accountability (Simkins, 2003) are often structured by the understanding of language in which they are framed.

Language

One of the most significant themes to emerge as my research progressed was the need to interrogate language as used to describe schools, education and teaching in order to identify the unarticulated assumptions which underpin and legitimise such descriptions.

Clandinin & Connelly (2000), whose work is based in narrative inquiry, write of their difficulties working with a team of people whose work was firmly based on rationalist principles. They describe how they had to struggle not to get caught up in the tentacles of the rationalism that surrounded them. This rationalism finds expression in a way to think (e.g., about behaviour); think in a language of objectives, think in terms of observable behaviour, think causally, think numerically, “think generally with a God’s eye view” (p.25), think about the here and now. They had to struggle to escape these tentacles. These tentacles made them feel that their narrative thinking was somehow less than acceptable, was weak, effete and soft, and lacking in rigour, precision and certainty.

From either side of the boundary (between narrative inquiry and rationalist thinking) one appears to be communicating with people on the other side – people who are out of focus; not quite able to speak clearly; and who render ideas, thoughts, and suggestions that somehow miss the mark. (p. 29)

Atkinson & Claxton (2000) challenge the assumption that professional competence is best acquired when the practitioner is able to explain and justify his or her knowledge. They claim that formal knowledge is usually “explicit, conscious, language-based, and constructed as a theoretical model” (p. 4), whereas teaching

skills, by contrast, develop through experience and can result in competent performance in specific contexts before the ability to give an account of the learned expertise has been developed – if, indeed, it ever does develop. Polanyi (1958: 31) observed that virtuosity cannot *in principle* be fully articulated because it embodies observations, feelings, interpretations, perceptions that are too nuanced to be expressed as mere words. Claxton (2000: 40) refers to intuition as “a *different* way of knowing, one which does not rely on articulate fluency.” He sees intuition as a process of drawing on and extracting meaning from a largely tacit database of first-hand practical experience rather than of rational deduction. However, he cautions that intuition is fallible and we need to be constantly sceptical; something which does not come easily with what is perceived rather than logically deduced.

Hirst (1996) acknowledges the complexity of professional practice, and the difficulty of articulating and defending such practices. He calls on teachers to continue to aspire to the use of reason to articulate and defend practice. However, he believes this requires the development of forms of *practical* rather than *theoretical* reasoning. He distinguishes between these forms of reasoning saying that in theoretical reasoning “concepts and propositions are developed solely in understanding and explaining our world in the pursuit of truth irrespective of any practical purposes” (p.171). By contrast, the object of practical reasoning is the development of “practical principles (which) are the outcomes of successful practice” (p. 171). He calls for a new practical discourse in which new forms of experimentation and research will become possible which can develop and validate practice.

Furlong (2000: 29) acknowledges that one of the strengths of new rationalism is its concern with the development of public and explicit definitions of quality. However, he argues the case, put forward by critical theorists, that the objective knowledge that such rationalists argue for is partial, and itself must be held up to constant scrutiny. He argues that intuition needs to take its place alongside rationalism and the constant need for discourse. It cannot be seen as a substitute for either.

Bourdieu (1994) argues that academic language used in education is a dead language; it is spoken nowhere else. It has its own code in transmitting information; a code in which words, symbols and structures have meanings different to those in everyday use. While he was speaking about the university sector, his observations are also relevant for second-level. Thus, for example, words like ‘explain’, ‘describe’, ‘illustrate’ have specific meanings when used in academic examinations. Similarly, school structures and symbols of authority are not self-explanatory. Teachers cannot assume that students understand them just because they ought to understand.

Learning means acquiring both knowledge itself and the code of transmission used to convey the particular body of knowledge. Communication is pedagogical only when it communicates the code effectively. Many teachers either do not understand or do not accept this. Bourdieu (1994) claims that this lies at the root of a common perception of the student as lacking in knowledge and understanding; the teacher is “resigned to his students and their ‘natural’ incapacities” (p. 7). Meanwhile, the majority of students cast the teacher in the role of ‘master of wisdom’. The relationship thus becomes one of “complicity in mutual misunderstanding” (p. 8).

These issues relating to the language teachers use in conceptualising their practice provide some insights into privatism among teachers, and also into why teachers are so easily repositioned in public debate.

The selfhood of the teacher

Identity and integrity

The centrality of the selfhood of the teacher is recognised and noted in passing very frequently in the literature, but there is not much literature devoted specifically to the topic. Palmer’s (2007) book is one exception. Its premise is that good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; it comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. He defines identity as the moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make a person who they are. Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons (2006: 602) say that teachers’ identities are created and re-created from a dynamic tension between structure (external influence) and agency (one’s ability to pursue one’s goals). They use the terms self and identity interchangeably. For Palmer, integrity lies in relating to these forces in ways that bring wholeness and life.

As to why this is important in teaching, he says:

Teachers possess the power to create conditions that can help students learn a great deal – or keep them from learning much at all. Teaching is the intentional act of creating those conditions, and *good teaching requires that we understand the inner sources of both the intent and the act.* (p. 7, my emphasis)

He claims that good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. “They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves” (p. 11). Weaving this web of connections involves the teacher’s own selfhood.

In every class I teach, my ability to connect with my students, and to connect them with the subject, depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood – and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning. (p. 10-11).

Ryan *et al.* (2004) concur, saying that the teacher's subjectivity is central to facilitating learning; that they are often required to make judgements about how to act, "and in doing so to draw on all of their knowledge (personal-professional, theoretical and practical)" (p. 61). They add that especially when dealing with the emotions of learners, there are no ready solutions or templates to hand. The teacher must exercise wisdom. "Wisdom has reflective, affective and experiential qualities, as well as a moral-ethical dimension and as such, it is a way of feeling, thinking, knowing and being" (p. 61). It involves the whole person.

Rogers (2003) observes that not only teachers' identities are present in the classroom, but students (whether adults or children) also bring their own sense of self-identity constructed from various different elements.

We need to learn first how our students regard themselves in terms of their own adulthood and how they construct other adults as well as how we as teachers construct them as adults and as students. (p. 54)

This is a very personal process, and applies as much to teachers at second-level as to those teaching adult students, to whom the author refers.

Palmer (2007) also speaks of the authority to teach. He says that in a culture of technique, we often confuse authority with power, but the two are not the same. Power works from the outside in, but authority works from the inside out. "Authority is granted to people who are seen as authoring their own works, their own actions, their own lives, rather than playing a scripted role at great remove from their own hearts" (p. 34). This again implies that the teacher's authority comes from the investment of 'self' in the role.

Speaking about school principals, Sugrue (1995: 8) says that principals are simultaneously positioned by their role and position themselves within the role as important 'power brokers'. He cites Giddens (1991) saying that identity is created and sustained by the reflexive activities of the individual, and continues to be formed as the "nexus between 'ontological security' and 'existential anxiety'". I believe this is equally true of teachers.

Vulnerability

One of the manifestations of the centrality of the self in teaching is the vulnerability experienced by many teachers. Nias (1996:3) says the fact that teachers invest so much of their 'selves' in their work means that it "becomes a main site for their self-esteem and fulfilment, and so too for their vulnerability". Palmer (2007) says that teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability. As we try to connect ourselves and our subjects with our students, we make ourselves, as well as our subjects, vulnerable to indifference, judgement, ridicule.

I need not reveal personal secrets to feel naked in front of a class. I need only parse a sentence or work a proof on the board while my students doze off or pass notes. No matter how technical my subject may be, the things I teach are things I care about. (p. 17)

Saying that "I teach the things I *care* about" highlights the investment that teachers make in their work; my teaching comes from a place deep within my 'self'. It is intimately bound up with my ideals and values. Nias (1996) adds that teachers invest in the values which they believe their work represents, and are frustrated and distressed when prevented by other demands from doing what they see as 'real' work. She notes that this presents a paradox:

Teachers' idealism leads them to invest their moral and professional 'selves' in the job. However, this very investment makes them vulnerable to criticism from others, which may in turn lead them to sacrifice their ideals. (p. 5)

Morgan *et al.* (2010) find that things that happen in the classroom and staffroom have far greater impact on teachers' motivation than national or global issues. Of 20 positive experiences which teachers find motivating, the four most significant all relate to experiences inside the classroom; these are 1. enjoying the interpersonal relationships, 2. seeing children make progress, 3. children engaging seriously, and 4. planning having paid off. So, it is in interpersonal engagements within the classroom that teachers receive most satisfaction; there, too, they are at their most vulnerable.

Teachers' vulnerability is, ironically, one of their greatest assets in the classroom; it is what enables them to be authentic. But this is not often spoken about or understood, with the result that vulnerability is often seen as a liability. Teachers can only be invulnerable by withdrawing from authentic relationship with their students. Palmer (2007) says:

To reduce our vulnerability, we disconnect from students, from subjects, and even from ourselves. We build a wall between inner truth and outer performance, and we play-act the teacher's part. (p. 17)

In order to support teachers in their interactions with their students, it is necessary to recognise that their very selves are, and properly must be, bound up with what happens in the classroom and staffroom. If the 'self' is not nourished, it becomes divided, disconnected. Teachers struggle for wholeness, to remain true to their ideals and values, and to retain authenticity with their students. For Palmer (2007), wholeness is not the same thing as perfection; it means becoming more real by accepting who I am.

Moskvina (2006) argues that this reliance on the personality of the teacher as his/her main instrument or tool in the job means that teaching carries a high "risk of personality and professional deformation" for the teacher. She says:

The exaggerated development of (professionally) essential qualities (in a teacher) can turn them into their own opposites, in this way reducing the effectiveness of the pedagogical effort and making life difficult for the schoolteacher." (p.73)

As examples she says a sense of discipline can turn into dogmatic adherence to universally accepted rules and directives; a sense of principle can turn into categorical stubbornness against which there is no appeal; self control can turn into coldness.

This has implications for teacher continuing professional development. In providing support for teachers, efforts to support wholeness, to support an undivided self, should be high on the agenda. Focus on content or technique is not enough; as Palmer (2007) says: "as we learn more about who we are, we can learn techniques that reveal rather than conceal the personhood from which good teaching comes" (p. 25).

While certain authors such as those mentioned above acknowledge the role of teacher vulnerability in the work of teaching, this is not mirrored in official Irish policy documents. In fact, quite the opposite is the case; beginning from the perspective of the outputs of education, it is assumed that teachers can be educated or appropriately managed to achieve these results. (I take up this theme in more detail in Chapter 6).

Teacher, subject and students

Teachers teach subjects to students. They do so by creating a "web of connections" (Palmer, 2007: 11) between themselves, their subject and their students. Noddings (1992) refers to this also, saying "who the teacher is, who the students are, what they are trying to accomplish separately and together all matter in designing instruction (p. 8). Ryan *et al.* (2004) agree.

The course, the class group, the individual learners, counselling theories, discursive understandings of the world and of the individual, along with the tutor's subjectivity or self are part of a whole picture, which informs each action that the tutor takes in the classroom. (p. 58)

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) describe the teacher "not so much as a maker of curriculum but as part of it" (p. 28). So, again the teacher and subject are intertwined, and are in relationship with the students.

The nature of professionalism in teaching

The terms professional and professionalism have such common currency in everyday language that the explanatory power of these concepts is becoming meaningless. As Sachs (2003: 1) says:

At a time when real estate agents refer to themselves as professionals, and window cleaners claim that they provide a professional service and sellers of used cars celebrate a professional code of practice, we are left asking what relevance does the concept have for teachers individually and collectively?

That teaching is a profession is generally conceded, but what it means for a teacher to be a professional is not always clear. Indeed, Goodson & Hargreaves (1996) claim that in some circumstances professionalism "is viewed as a rhetorical ruse – a way to get teachers to misrecognise their own exploitation and to comply willingly with increased intensification of their labour in the workplace" (p.20), while Robertson (1996) points out that "teachers' sensitivity to their marginal professional status can be used to impose an agenda which is, in reality, antithetical to their interests as autonomous workers" (p. 39). She suggests that, in the past, the "ideology of professionalism" has politically immobilised teachers.

The very concept of teacher professionalism is strongly challenged. Hargreaves (2000) states that "one of the consequences of postmodern developments has been a set of assaults on professionalism" and refers to the "discourses of derision" (p. 168) which seek to undermine the status of teachers by holding them responsible for all the ills of the public education system. Teachers in Ireland have certainly experienced this derision, as O Sullivan (2005) attests, perhaps most strongly during the industrial action in 2000/2001. Thomas (2005: 53), examining recent education policy documents in Australia, finds that these "constructed a deficit discourse on teachers", categorising them as lacking in skills and understandings, positioning

them as needing increased regulation, and effectively removing their voice from the education debate.

As well as being challenged, the concept of teacher professionalism is also contested. Goodson & Hargreaves (1996: 4) state that “what it means to be professional, to show professionalism or to pursue professionalisation is not universally agreed or understood”. They go on to describe five overlapping discourses which carry different connotations for what it means for teachers to be professional. They suggest that different understandings of teacher professionalism have implications for the way in which teachers see their roles and also for the expectations which will be placed on them by others. This is referred to by Sugrue, Morgan, Devine & Raftery (2001) in their report on the policy and practice of professional development for teachers in Ireland. They show that the forms of professional development made available to teachers are determined by understandings of teacher professional practice.

Professionalism and professionalisation

Here, I must draw attention to the distinction between professionalism (performing one's role to standards that merit the description “professional”) and professionalisation (acquiring the status of a “profession” for a particular occupation). While these are not necessarily conflicting concepts, they may be so at times. This can happen especially when professionalisation is pursued for the sake of status, salary etc, without a simultaneous effort to define professionalism and pursue it in practice. However, both are important as it has to be recognised that professions are accorded a status which provides their members with recognition, trust and forms of support which enable them to perform their role in ways and to standards that merit the description ‘professional’ (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996).

Towards a new model of professionalism

Sachs (2003: 10-11) argues for what she calls for “a transformative professionalism” (p. 12) for the postmodern age. She says that traditional claims to professionalism have been based on areas such as knowledge, responsibility and autonomy, and that these sometimes became more focused on professionalisation than professionalism. She claims that altruism, an ethical concern by the group for its clients, must be a central feature of a new professionalism. And she adds:

The politics of professionalism are partly about government action that affects teachers, but they are also about the ways in which teachers choose to respond and to depict themselves ... there is a choice. (p. 7)

Bottery & Barnett (1996), state that teachers (and other professionals), in order to defend themselves better, have to understand themselves better. This means understanding their practice and what would make it more successful, but also understanding themselves vis-à-vis the society in which they live. Such self knowledge allows them to assess their weaknesses and strengths. It also allows them to place themselves within a wider picture and to identify their place in a “complex ecology of occupations” (p. 191). This links closely with questions of language, and emerges as an important theme throughout the research.

Goodson & Hargreaves (1996: 21, 22) propose a model of ‘postmodern professionalism’ based on seven principles: the opportunity to exercise discretionary judgement; opportunities to engage with the moral and social purposes of education; a commitment to working with colleagues in collaborative cultures; occupational heteronomy rather than self-protective autonomy; a commitment to active care, not just anodyne service for students; a self-directed search and struggle for continuous learning; and the recognition of high task complexity. This is a model which I believe has considerable merit.

The work of the Teaching Council will establish the understandings of professionalism in teaching which will greatly influence the work of teachers. Noting that the Teaching Council Act (2001) requires that the Teaching Council must “establish standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence”, Conway *et al* (2009: xxv1), in their report to the Council, recommend that:

the complexity of professional practice across the continuum would need to be captured in any framework of standards. It is important to resist the idea that teaching can be reduced to a number of discrete competences or standards.

I return to this theme in Chapter 6 (p. 152).

Summary

In the course of my research, the exploration of the literature and the data collection and analysis proceeded in tandem. In this chapter, I have highlighted some of the themes which emerged in the study in order to heighten readers’ sensitivity towards them in Sections B and C of the thesis.

In particular, I have highlighted a recurring divergence of emphasis between official Irish policy documents on education and the authors I have selected in relation to issues which emerged in the course of the study.

This chapter is not a comprehensive literature review. In keeping with a grounded theory approach, references to literature are interwoven throughout the thesis.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Believing that the researchers' ontological and epistemological positions influence the methodologies they choose, in this chapter, I outline my epistemological stance and identify methodological principles enshrined in a number of recognised research methodologies which are consistent with this stance.

I indicate how elements of narrative inquiry, action research and constructivist grounded theory are founded on principles which I hoped to use. I explain why I was unable to commit exclusively to any one of these methodologies, but how I drew from them, in a planned way, in devising a methodology for my study which I believe was values-based, rigorous, congruent with the subject matter of my study, and possible within its parameters.

I describe my concerns about my ability to conduct interviews that would lead to learning for both my participants and myself, and how I addressed this matter. And I describe how I developed a methodology for the research which I believe was very successful. I also discuss ethical concerns, as well as how data was collected, analysed and presented.

My Epistemological Stance

What is epistemology?

Epistemology, the theory of knowledge, is concerned with what constitutes knowledge, its scope and validity, and how it can be generated or acquired. Research is a process whose aim is the generation of new knowledge. So, one's epistemology inevitably affects how one does research. Epistemology is a contested area. There are various understandings of what constitutes valid knowledge, and how it can be generated. Various research paradigms support and facilitate the generation of knowledge, and these are underpinned by specific epistemological stances.

Research paradigms can be clustered under two broad headings: absolutist or fallibilist (Ernst, 1994). An absolutist paradigm views 'truth' as something which can be discovered by suitable and rigorous research. Most scientific or positivist research comes into this category. Knowledge thus generated is replicable and generalisable. Methodologies used are frequently quantitative, and the values of the researcher are

not regarded as important. The purpose of the research is to control and predict. Some interpretive research also stems from this standpoint, and seeks to justify reaching generalisable conclusions through such methods as triangulation.

However, most research in the interpretive and critical paradigms originates from a fallibilist standpoint, to which I subscribe. Here it is believed that while there may (or may not) be a universal truth, each of us can only construct our own beliefs. We study and research in order to bring these beliefs more into congruence with our personal and social worlds, and to attempt to make sense of these worlds, of our place in them and of our relationships with them. We do not believe that our 'truths' represent universal truth, or claim generalisability for our findings – we recognise that others have their beliefs and understandings, we respect these, and we learn by sharing our own understandings with them. We test the validity of our knowledge in dialogue with others, willing to learn from them. While we recognise that our findings are specific to our particular research project, and while we do not claim generalisability and reliability, we do claim that they may provide insights which can lead to new understandings of issues in wider contexts. Research methodologies under the fallibilist heading include ethnography, radical constructivism, feminism, narrative inquiry and action research. These methodologies recognise that the beliefs and values of the researcher are central to the research process and its outcomes.

What do I believe?

I believe that knowledge is deeply personal and nuanced; it is a product of a person's biology, personality, and history (which is constituted by their experiences). We construct meaning from our experiences (or from how we interpret our experiences), and the constructions we make are personal. An event will not be experienced in the same way by different people, it will not be interpreted in the same way, and the knowledge constructed from it will not be the same. This means that knowledge is personal. It is socially and culturally constructed. The validity of knowledge, then, can only be – and must be – tested in dialogue with others. This is how we avoid the danger of unchecked relativism. For teachers, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) use the term *personal practical knowledge* to describe the knowledge which underpins their professional role. I believe this, like all knowledge, to be acquired predominantly through experience.

What does the literature say about constructivism?

This kind of epistemological stance is referred to in the literature as constructivist. Radical constructivists assume there is no real world (Jaramillo, 1996). They hold that objective reality is a fabrication, devised and accepted by groups of individuals to define their world's parameters. They believe that each learner's perception of reality depends on his/her interpretive experiences. Learners construct knowledge via their prior experiences, mental structures, and beliefs. Learning occurs when learners are actively involved in activities that interest them and that are just above the level of their current competence. To learn concepts, the learner must experience them and socially negotiate them in the context of a complex learning environment. Hence, we cannot study an individual's learning in isolation. Moen (2006) concurs with this view, stating that how people become what they are depends on what they have experienced in the social contexts in which they have participated. She claims that research cannot be conducted on individuals in isolation from their social and historical contexts. Thus, a person's world influences the person, and *vice-versa*. This mutual dependence between a person's experience and learning is echoed by Vygotsky (2004) who claims that there is a double, mutual dependence between imagination and experience. While imagination is developed by the richness of our experiences, it also becomes a means by which we can conceptualise something from what we read, hear or discuss, even if we have not directly experienced it ourselves. Thus our learning is not confined by the narrow boundaries of our own experience, but we can assimilate, with the help of our imagination, another person's historical or social experience.

This understanding of the role of the imagination was something which gave me courage to use a constructivist and narrative methodology by addressing a concern which I had formulated early in my work; "how can I learn from another's experiential knowing in ways that I can understand it from his or her point of view?" In short, how would I be able to interpret their stories in a manner that did justice to *their* learning and intent?

How could I go about finding answers to my questions

There were many methodologies available to me, each of which is grounded in a particular epistemology. I could have taken a quantitative approach and surveyed a large number of teachers about their experiences. However, I did not seriously consider this option as I believed that such a survey would be incapable of revealing the nuances and intricacies of teachers' lived experiences, and hence unable to lead to

the kind of understandings I was hoping to achieve. In addition, while such an approach would lead to 'findings', the process would not have been inherently educational, and I did not believe it could provide me with the personal learning which was important to me in the study.

So, I decided early on that I would choose an interpretive research methodology. It seemed quite clear to me that what I would be attempting would be to reach understandings of the issues prompting my study and that this would involve interpretation in some form of the information that my participants would contribute. Initially, narrative inquiry appeared to be the most appropriate methodology. However, when I realised I could not use this as a single methodology, I then needed to draw from others also to create methodology that was valid for this particular study.

Methodologies from which I have drawn

Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a research methodology within the interpretive paradigm. It is a study of the stories people tell, and it interested me because I felt that what I needed to understand was people's actual experiences rather than their ideas. I needed to understand the heart and the gut as well as the head. Believing teaching to be an activity involving the emotions, I wished to explore the emotional as well as the rational dimensions of the job. I believed that the methods of narrative inquiry indicated ways in which this could be achieved.

Narrative inquiry takes as its starting point the assumption that life, to borrow John Dewey's (1938) metaphor, *is* education. Educators are interested in life. They are interested in learning and teaching and how it takes place. They are, as Clandinin & Connelly (2000: xxii) claim "interested in the leading out of different lives, the values, attitudes, beliefs, social systems, institutions and structures, and how they are all linked to learning and teaching". For educational researchers, people's lives and how they are composed are what is of interest. Writers in the narrative field (e.g., Moen, 2006) believe that as we make our way through life, we have continuous experiences and dialogic interactions both with ourselves and our world. They believe that individuals learn and develop through participation in social activities in their world. Thus, society has a continuous influence on the individual, and *vice-*

versa. Moen (2006) says that human beings learn and develop in the *mutual* interactions between individual and society. Thus, interpretation of narratives is located in social constructivism.

The experiences and dialogic interactions which help to form people are all woven together into a seamless web which might be seen as overwhelming in its complexity. One way of structuring these experiences is to organise them into meaningful units, and one such meaningful unit could be a story or narrative. For most people, telling stories is a natural way of recounting and creating reasonable order out of experience. For the narrative inquirer, life itself is considered a narrative inside of which there are many smaller narratives. Narrative inquiry is thus the study of how people experience the world, and how they describe that experience in their stories. Narrative researchers seek to collect, understand, interpret and record these stories.

Since people learn and develop through their mutual interactions with their world, they must be considered as always learning and developing. So, no person can be described definitively and finally. All research with individuals must be studied within the parameters of time and context, and findings must be seen as relevant to the time and context of the research. Further, since people, their worlds, and their positions in and interactions with their worlds are constantly developing, narrative inquiry concerns itself, not with static descriptions of “how things are”, but with time- and context-based descriptions of how people learn and grow. Narratives are always under construction as we get new experiences, and as stories are told and retold. Hence, narrative inquiry has the possibility of capturing the individual and the context.

In order to understand people’s experiences, we must listen to their stories. Narrative inquirers believe that the richness and nuances of an individual’s professional life and understandings cannot be captured in definitions or abstract theory, but can be glimpsed through the stories people tell. Interpreting these stories is not simple. It requires first of all an understanding of why people choose particular stories (from the vast web of their experience) to tell. This choice depends on their past and present experiences, their values, who the stories are being told to, and when and where they are being told. The process of narrative inquiry must also recognise that stories are oral accounts of experiences, not the experiences themselves. In interpreting these and transmitting them to written form, the narrative inquirer must be careful to convey the meaning of the story from the narrator’s point of view. Hence, of fundamental importance in narrative inquiry is the co-construction of the narrative by the researcher and the participant.

Narrative inquiry is surrounded by debate about how to inquire into and represent the social world. Clandinin & Connelly (2000: 24) argue that “at this time, if narrative inquiry is paradigmatic (or at least if it fits within a paradigm), it is a paradigm marked by challenges to accepted inquiry and representation assumptions”. Hence, they claim that students of narrative quickly learn to defend and argue for their work outside the narrative frame of reference. They term this as learning to think narratively at the boundaries between narrative and other forms of inquiry and claim this is important for successful narrative thinking. They identify a number of tensions which result from thinking narratively at the boundaries. These tensions relate to the different ways in which narrative and grand narrative researchers view temporality, context, people, action and certainty in the context of research. The narrative approach sees people as individuals with unique understandings rather than as representative of a group or social category, and engages with them from the points of view of the personal and social (interaction); their past, present and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative thinking seeks to escape reductionism and formalism. It rejects objectivism as a depersonalised notion of truth and meaning. It begins with experience as expressed in lived and told stories, not in theory. In fact, it often originates from the researcher’s autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the research question, as in this study. Elements which characterise narrative research methodology include the collaborative process between the researcher and participants, how narrative is developed from an experiential and orally told story into a written text, the interpretive nature of the process (as well as of the story and text), and the rerelationship between theory and empirical data. All of these ideas seem to me to be congruent with my ontological and epistemological stances, and I have attempted to include them in my methodology.

Phillion (2002) identifies three fundamental qualities which she also describes as narrative inquiry methods. These are thinking narratively, being in the midst of lives and making meaning of experience in relationship.

Thinking narratively: she describes how, the more she learned about her research participant (Pam), the more she experienced theory as abstract and decontextualised. She found it difficult to set aside theory and focus on Pam as a person – she first had to learn and understand her own story, how her own biases influenced what she saw, and what she could see. I expected at the outset that this was something I would

have to face in my research. In Chapter 6, I reflect on how this happened for me during the research.

Being in the midst of lives: the researcher spent 2-3 days per week, 3-8 hours per day in the school, classroom, meetings, and school functions with Pam. She observed, participated in and shared her professional life; she had ongoing conversations and wrote voluminous field notes. Such a time commitment was not possible for me in this study.

Making meaning of experience in relationship: the researcher began gradually to see Pam as Pam, not as a representative of an ethnic group, or of the literature. She began to recognise Pam's own personal practical knowledge derived from her experience. They began to co-create meaning within their relationship. Co-creating knowledge in this way could not have been done by what she refers to as "blitzkrieg ethnography" (p. 538) (for example, in once-off interviews). The researcher came to realise how imprisoned she was by her own biography and the theoretical literature that "comfortably cohabited" with her biography (p. 542).

What was at stake was not just a study of an individual, but the study of the researcher's relationship with that individual. The researcher discovered how intimately people must learn and know themselves in order to know each other. Without this self-examination she claims that her own work would still have had all the hallmarks of objectivity, but would have been little more than an expression of her unexplored subjectivity. So narrative inquiry has much to do with reflection and writing.

Phillion (2002) learned that the narrative researcher should not be on a quest to find an answer to some question (at least not totally). Rather, he or she must be a fluid inquirer with a narrative that evolves as he or she encounters new ideas, new situations and new outlooks on life.

It seems to me that narrative inquiry, as described by the writers referred to above, provides a flexible, realistic approach for researching the nuances and complexities of teachers' personal practical knowledge and of their professional practice. It recognises people, their lives and experiences, as the starting point for the research, with theory as a lens to be applied later and which might help to extract insights and learning from what might initially appear as ordinary or mundane. It provides the possibility of glimpsing insights and understandings that could not be achieved by an intellectual discussion, by 'blitzkrieg ethnography' or by quantitative methods. It also recognises that the researcher's own biography is an important element of the inquiry

and also needs to be interrogated, understood and articulated; to do otherwise would be to claim an objectivity which would be unjustified and unhelpful.

Reflecting on these issues, while there was much in narrative inquiry which I hoped to incorporate into the way in which I would conduct my research, the practicalities of my research project made narrative inquiry in its 'purest' form impractical as a methodology for the purposes of my research. Exponents of narrative inquiry emphasise that the methodology requires that the researcher spend a large amount of time in the company of the participant, and would require visiting the classrooms and staffrooms of participants as, for example, Phillion (2002) did. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) say that narrative inquirers "settle in, live and work alongside participants" (p. 67). They add:

Narrative inquiry in the field is a form of living, a way of life. Of course, there have been well-known, well-publicised narrative inquiries where researcher-driven interviews supported by tape recorders have been the method. These may be appropriate for their purpose, but should not be mistaken for the whole of narrative inquiry. (p.78)

This level of access to any individual was not possible for me because I am not a full-time researcher and also because it would be difficult in the Irish school context to obtain such access to classrooms and staffrooms. I also had ethical concerns about asking so much from a participant when I was so inexperienced as a researcher myself. So, I reluctantly had to acknowledge that I could not use narrative inquiry alone as my research methodology. However, in devising my methodology, I wished to draw heavily from narrative inquiry and incorporate many of its principles.

Action research

Action research is frequently defined as an intervention in practice designed to bring about improvement (e.g., Lomax, 1994). Though there are differing approaches to action research, there are certain characteristics associated with the methodology which I find attractive. It is insider research. Critical reflection on one's values, practice and the context of one's work is central to the process. Indeed, McNiff's (2000) 'living theory' approach sees action research fundamentally as a systematic way in which to attempt to reconcile practice with values. It is cyclical and generative (i.e., it constantly suggests new avenues for inquiry). It is based on the Aristotelian principle of *praxis*: developing understanding and practice hand-in-hand. It is fundamentally a values-based research. It is also rigorous. In fact, without rigour, it is not action research, but just good practice. The rigour must apply to every stage of the process; from the articulation of the concern and the values underpinning it at the

beginning of the research, to the formulation of the plan for intervention, the collection and analysis of data, to the testing of conclusions, and to the accounting of the process. Validation in action research is an on-going process rather than a once-off at the end of the project. It involves justifying the relevance of the work within the professional knowledge available through others' research and then testing it out in dialogue with professional colleagues and with the literature. Action research is usually depicted as a collaborative process also, close interaction with colleagues being a criterion for validity in the process. Another characteristic of the methodology is the relationship between the researcher and researchee; it is research *with*, not research *on*. Hence, the relationship is one requiring greater equality than in some other forms of research. In fact, in many instances, the participant is seen as co-researcher in the process.

For my research, however, action research as a methodology was unsuitable. Firstly, its focus on intervention in practice was not consistent with my objectives in this study. And, secondly, it was too rooted in the present time; it does not easily allow for the study of the development of a career. However, I hoped that the principles of action research, in particular the nature of the relationships between researcher and participant, the focus on learning for both, the recognition of the subjectivity of the researcher in the process, and its explicit aim of seeking to achieve congruence between the researcher's values and practice, could be incorporated in the methodology I chose to carry out my research. As in the case of narrative inquiry which is also a contested research paradigm, the explication of rigorous criteria for validity was also something which I wanted to ensure in my methodology.

Constructivist grounded theory

Grounded theory is a research methodology designed to construct theory about issues that are important in people's lives. It does this through a process of data collection and analysis that is inductive in nature. This means that the researcher does not set out with pre-conceived ideas to prove or disprove. Rather s/he collects data pertinent to the area under study, and through a rigorous process of data analysis, issues of importance emerge and can be theorised. Thus, in this methodology the exploration of the literature takes place in parallel with, or even after the data analysis. As developed in the 1960s, grounded theory was based in the positivist paradigm. However, many researchers have adopted and adapted the methodology to fit with various ontological and epistemological positions. Based in a relativist ontological position, and a subjectivist epistemology, researchers using constructivist grounded

theory have adapted the traditional methods of grounded theory. Mills, Bonner & Francis (2006) have identified three requirements for a constructivist approach which contrasts with traditional grounded theory approaches. First is the creation of a sense of reciprocity between the participants and the researcher in the construction of meaning and, ultimately, a theory that is grounded in the participants' and researcher's experiences. Engaging in constructivist enquiry requires a transformation of the researcher-participant relationship, where interviews involve "active interpretations between two people leading to results that are both mutually negotiated and contextual" (p. 9).

The second requirement of a constructivist approach is counterbalancing imbalances of power between interviewer and participant, lessening the traditional hierarchical relationship which casts the participant in a subordinate role. This requires scheduling interviews at locations and times of the participants' choosing, using flexible and relatively unstructured approaches to questioning, thus yielding some control over the flow and content of the interview, sharing the researcher's understanding of the key issues arising, as well as sharing personal details and answering participants' questions both during the interview and afterwards. Researchers must also focus on the benefits for participants from their participation in the process. In short, the researcher must invest his or her personality in the research process in order to establish a less hierarchical relationship.

Mills, Bonner & Francis's (2006) third criterion for a constructivist approach in grounded theory relates to the production of the final text. Here, they refer to the delicate balance required to enable participants' stories and accounts to remain visible in the final text. This is important to enable the reader to make connections between the analytical findings and the data from which these were derived. It is also important as a means of respecting the participant as a contributor to the final text. The same authors refer to the "thorny question of how to resolve the tension that exists between developing a conceptual analysis of participants' stories and still creating a sense of their presence in the final text" (2006b, 7).

These are principles on which I also wished to base my work.

The interviewing process

For pragmatic reasons, interviews would be a significant method of data collection in my research. Thus, I needed to find methods for conducting interviews which were consistent with the methodological principles I have outlined.

Franklin (1997) identifies three models of interviewing, the *information extraction* model, the *shared understanding* model, and the *discourse* model. The *information extraction* model represents the traditional view of the interview where the interviewer takes the active role of questioner and the interviewee the passive role of respondent. The interviewer uses a prepared set of questions, does not respond substantively to what the interviewee says, is friendly enough to encourage the interviewee to provide the required information, and does not express his/her own views. Based on an objectivist epistemology, this model assumes that the interviewer can extract from the interviewee the information (ideas, knowledge and/or feelings) required. It assumes that these ideas, knowledge and/or feelings reside in the interviewee and can be “brought forth in the interview with varying degrees of completeness and veracity – depending in part on the ‘openness’ and ‘articulateness’ of the interviewee, and in part on the skill of the interviewer in creating an appropriate environment” (Franklin, 1997: 100). It views language as external, determined and determining rather than as an emergent social activity (Collins, 1998). The aim of this model of interviewing is scientific objectivity; to obtain comparable information from different interviewees which can later be coded and quantified for analysis.

Coming from a subjectivist, constructivist epistemology, the fundamental assumptions underpinning the *information extraction* model of interviewing are not seen as valid. Congruence with such an epistemology requires more reciprocal, less hierarchical approaches. Such approaches are incorporated by the *shared understanding* and *discourse* models of interviewing as described by Franklin (1997). In the *shared understanding* model, the interview is construed as an interpersonal situation in which the interviewer attempts to gain an understanding of the interviewee’s experience of aspects of her life from her own perspective through a process of exchange and even empathy. It is recognised that in such an interview situation, understandings are not only shared, but sometimes new meanings are created.

Franklin’s *discourse* model goes further, viewing the interview as a ‘speech event’ (p. 104). In this model it is recognised that interviewers and interviewees both have

points of view which have been shaped by their personal experiences, and hence the subjectivity of the interviewer as well as that of the interviewee are central in the process. In this conceptualisation, meaning is formed, and not merely expressed or reported, during the process of the interview. Interviewers, in this model, use a conversational mode. They respond to what the interviewee says, even adding contributions from their own experience, and new themes that arise in the exchange can be pursued. The *discourse* model places more emphasis on the meaning-constructive function of language than does the *shared understanding* model. The latter might be more in the form of a guided monologue whereas in the *discourse* model the interview is seen more in the context of social interaction or conversation.

Mills, Bonner & Francis (2006) also view the interview as a social interaction for the purpose of producing new meaning, this new meaning being produced by the interviewer and interviewee together. They argue that interviews are not “neutral, context-free tools for data collection” (p.9). Rather, they provide a site for the interaction between two people where new meanings can be arrived at which are mutually negotiated and contextualised. Collins (1998) goes further to say that in the interview situation the parties may be communicating and sharing not only meaning, but ‘selves’ and therefore identity. Mills, Bonner & Francis (2006) suggest that in such situations the interviewer needs to adopt a reflexive stance, and offer a number of strategies to help move the researcher and participants to a more equal sharing of power. Collins does not offer such strategies, suggesting that “if I think too much about riding my bike, I fall off” (1998: 15). He suggests instead that we should recognise the complexity of the interview as a social interaction, and approach the process with humility and sensitivity. I believe that in not offering a set of strategies, he is acknowledging the uniqueness of each individual as an interviewer, and of the uniqueness of the interpersonal situation constituted by each interview situation. Despite my relative inexperience as a researcher, I would need to draw on my judgement, empathy and experience of life to make my interviewing successful.

I was also conscious of the risks associated with over-reliance on interviews. Citing Bourdieu (1977), Collins (1998) argues that interviews are a poor methodology because interviewees are likely to provide the interviewer with the ‘official account’ which reifies norms, values and ideals, an account which describes what ought to happen rather than what actually does happen. While Collins (1998) points out that this need not be such a problem where one is trying to find out more about peoples’ lives and experience, it is still something I had to keep in mind.

Hence, in devising my methodology, interviews would only be one of the methods used. I would need to build opportunities for data collection and reflection other than in face-to-face interviews.

Ethical questions

Bassey (1990:18) summarises the ethics of research as 'respect for persons' and 'respect for truth'. Ethical issues must be addressed by researchers in all paradigms. Because of the 'cut and dried' nature of its methodology, such issues are usually straightforward in empirical research. In the interpretive paradigm, however, ethical considerations such as permission, privacy, and confidentiality of identity and data are important. My particular study gave rise to a number of specific ethical concerns.

In order to get rich data I would need to work deeply with a small number of participants rather than shallowly with many. I would need to gain their confidence before they would become comfortable sharing the kind of information I hoped to obtain as data. Thus, I had an ethical concern not to lead people into areas where they were uncomfortable or did not wish to go. Such an outcome could result if I focused too much on obtaining data without sufficient sensitivity to their vulnerabilities.

Also, our conversations would have to be mutually supportive and be focused on joint learning as we both explored potentially uncomfortable areas. I would have to be as open with them as I hoped they would be with me; the notion of "no intimacy without reciprocity" (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006: 10) would have to apply.

I entered this process with some strongly held beliefs (or biases). However, their degree of accuracy was untested. Hence, they would need to be articulated and presented to participants. But I needed to find a way to do this which would not force the direction of the conversations or interfere with their telling of their stories. I must also submit these beliefs to the scrutiny of the reader of this thesis, along with the data from participants.

The methodology for this study

My methodology is not a 'pure' form narrative inquiry but is based very largely on narrative inquiry. There is always a danger when adapting a methodology, that omitting an aspect might invalidate the whole. In my case, the time constraint which made it impossible for me to "settle in, live and work alongside participants" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 67) would have to be addressed in a different way if my methodology were to remain valid.

I realised that I could not rely on interviews alone as a method of data collection, I could not rely on my own interpretation in analysing the data, nor could I stand over the validity of the accounts of participants' stories I would write unless they were co-constructed by us both. Hence, I developed an iterative methodology in which I initially met with participants and negotiated the terms of our collaboration. We then held a series of interviews or conversations. After each, I provided participants with a transcript; I also gave them what I had written, as well as my thoughts, interpretation and reflections for their scrutiny. I also invited their thoughts and observations. This process allowed the narrative, being constructed in the process of the research to be presented to participants in a leisurely way, allowing time for reflection, consideration and negotiation, while avoiding the risk of distorting their primary narrative⁹ which might have happened had I presented it to them under the pressure of the actual interview situation.

This iterative approach represents a modified form of narrative inquiry, but also incorporates principles and methods from action research and constructivist grounded theory. It provides not only for a method of data collection, but also enabled forms of data analysis and presentation which were congruent with my values as a researcher; it represents a valid research methodology.

Choosing my participants

I wished in my study to look at second-level teachers' careers, how they were shaped, and how teachers' personal lives and careers intersected and influenced each other. Hence, the five participants I chose have spent many years in teaching or have recently retired. I also chose participants who, I believed, would be open and

⁹ Note on terminology: The terms "narrative", "account" and "story" are used interchangeably in the literature. In this study, I have generally used the term narrative to describe a participant's story with my interpretations and comments included. I use the term "account" to describe the full summary of my conversations with each participant.

reflective. All were known to me; I had worked with some at different stages in my career; others I knew only slightly. I hoped that this familiarity might make it easier for them to be open with me but was also aware that if I did not get the setting right, the opposite would be the case. I chose them because I believed they could provide different insights into the issues I wished to study. Though I am sure I had expectations of what some might disclose, in every case I was quite surprised by what they had to say.

While my participants specialise in a wide range of disciplines such as religion, languages, practical subjects, maths, they were not chosen as representative of specific groups of teachers (for example, Robert is not representative of practical teachers, nor Ben of teachers in community schools); their accounts stand by themselves; this is in line with a narrative approach which holds that the study of individuals' experiences and lived stories can lead to the creation of deeper, more nuanced understandings than formalist studies where "people, if they are identified at all, are looked at as exemplars of a form – of an idea, a theory, a social category" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Because of this, and also because of the size of the sample, no claim will be made that the findings are representative of the beliefs of particular groups of teachers. Any claim to generalisability of specific findings will have to be done with caution and then justified. However, hopefully the findings will provide new insights or points of view which can inform the debate on the important issues which are the subject of this research.

I deliberately chose not to include principals or deputy principals in the study, as I wished to explore the experience of *teachers* and *teaching*, particularly in the classroom. Principals and deputies have heavy administrative roles; thus their priorities and perspectives are not necessarily those of the classroom teacher. In addition, principals and deputies carry the authority of their positions and this can result in a different experience for them in both staffroom and classroom.

All participants have spent a minimum of twenty five years in their current (or last) school. This was not deliberate, but they would be representative of the majority of senior teachers in Ireland in this regard; mobility among permanent, whole-time teachers is very limited. They are drawn from the secondary, vocational and community school sectors. All taught in co-educational schools; this too was not planned, and is not representative; 37% of second-level students in Ireland attend single sex schools (source: website of Department of Education and Science, accessed 17/10/2009).

I could have selected participants differently. By choosing participants from a similar age group, the exploration of the experience of teachers in early- or mid-career in this study must rely on memory. In addition, it relates to the past; school environments have changed in some significant respects in the meantime, though there is also much continuity. However, in a study of this size, it would not have been possible to obtain views of representative samples of teachers of all age groups. So, my findings relate to the careers of teachers who began in the job in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Some of their experiences will hold strong resonance with the situations of younger teachers today, others may not; I need to distinguish those which do from those which do not, and to explain and justify findings which I claim as applicable to all teachers.

Data Collection

Data was collected using the iterative methodology described above. I met with each of my participants on a number of occasions, ranging from three to seven times. The first two interviews with each participant lasted about an hour, and were taped and transcribed. Subsequent interviews tended to be shorter and more focused; some of these were taped, in others notes were made and written up later. Data consisted of the spoken word, but also written comments and observations by a number of participants.

In my interviews, I attempted to use principles enshrined in Franklin's (1997) discourse model. However, my early interviews suggested that this would not be easy, indeed may not always be appropriate; Franklin herself states that in her practice she draws on aspects of both the discourse and shared understanding models. For example, in my very first interview, I found that my interviewee had done a considerable amount of thinking in advance, and was quite excited by the process, and wished to tell me his story. What was needed in that situation was for me to play quite a passive role, at least until he had said all he wanted to say, and my aim of having a conversation too early in the interview was not helpful. My second participant had not prepared in the same way, and the manner in which the interview developed was more in line with the shared understanding model, even at times the information extraction model, than the discourse model. These experiences highlighted a number of issues for me. One was that the interviewee's perception of the process may be rooted in the information extraction model, which is probably the most widely held understanding of the interview process. Another was that the interviewee may not have fully understood, or trusted the implications of my idea of

co-construction of knowledge which necessarily involved them in reviewing and developing their own understandings. Hence I needed to approach this patiently and sensitively. The possibility of co-constructing knowledge must be an invitation rather than an imposition during the research process. While I hoped that the participants in my research would derive benefits for themselves from the process, this must ultimately be their choice. Indeed, my experience of interviewing has borne out Collins's (1998) contention that while interviews are commonly classified as 'structured' or 'unstructured', this can be misleading because even the most 'unstructured' interview is structured in a number of subtle ways.

As the first round of interviews was nearing completion, I was concerned that I was not getting the kind of information that I had hoped for. I felt that participants were not being as open as I had hoped, and felt that some of my strongly-held beliefs were not being reflected in participants' stories. From thinking about these issues and discussing them with my fellow students at a workshop in college, a number of ideas emerged. Firstly, I should put my ideas to my participants, and *trust* that they would not allow me to go too far if they did not agree with them. Secondly, some of my colleagues remarked that as principal, and because I tend to be reflective in nature, I might have had insights which others would not have. Even though I had thought about this, it was something I had tried not to consider as it seemed condescending. However, I realised that some of my participants also had insights into aspects of teaching which were different to mine, and I realised that insights are unique, but they are also *partial*. Hence it was legitimate for me to hold mine, but I needed to be careful not to give them too much emphasis; and to use the insights of all to attempt to create a more complete understanding. This also enabled me to proceed in researching unashamedly my own beliefs, while not elevating them above the beliefs of others. Thirdly, I realised that it takes time for people to become comfortable, and to open up. One of the reasons for this in the case of my participants was that they had invested so much of themselves in their careers that it was not easy for them to be over-critical. Additionally, even though some of them knew me (or perhaps because of this) this was a new relationship between us in which they must have felt as unsure as I did. A colleague suggested that furthermore, when people gave an account of themselves in public, they tended to strive for justification; and that there is a modern tendency to seek and to value coherence, even when it does not exist. And fourthly, it was suggested that I be interviewed myself as part of the research process; this experience of being interviewed would help me understand the whole interviewing process (about which I was quite unconfident). It would also enable me to articulate my beliefs and to present them in the thesis on a similar basis to those of

my participants. Subsequently I was interviewed by a colleague, and data from that interview is included in my findings. These insights helped me very much as the research continued.

I found that in second and subsequent interviews, participants were very much more open and forthcoming. The process of submitting my thoughts and reflections for their scrutiny between interviews enabled them to develop their trust in me and in the process, and this enabled the collection of very rich data. While my first meetings with participants could rightly be called interviews, later meetings could perhaps better be described as conversations; if described as interviews, they approached Franklin's (1997) discourse model; certainly the principles of the discourse model were realised in the overall iterative process.

Throughout the process, I followed Franklin's (1997) method of refraining from offering 'reconstructions' of participant's narratives in the interview process, except when seeking clarity. I also followed Hargreaves' (1999) suggestion of trying to elicit reported emotions by asking interviewees to describe positive and negative critical incidents. I hoped also that in this way we would be able to arrive at understandings which would celebrate the richness and complexity of the participants' professional lives, and of mine.

I believe that the iterative interviewing process worked well. Moen (2006: 3) says that "meaning and understanding cannot be transferred from one person to the next; rather they are created when voices engage in dialogue with each other". My methodology enabled this to happen. Three participants remarked how their how understandings had been enhanced during the process in which we engaged.

My own interview

Mid-way through the research, I was interviewed myself. I wanted to do this because I wished to explore and attempt to articulate the beliefs (and/or biases) which had led me to the study, and also because I felt unconfident about the interviewing process, and so wished to explore it from a different point of view. The interview did help me articulate and, in some cases clarify beliefs and values, and to see how I had positioned myself in the context of many of the issues relating to the study. I also felt more comfortable in my conversations with participants afterwards.

Analysing Data

Analysing and making sense of data from a narrative point of view involves ordering events along a temporal dimension and configuring them in such a way that themes emerge. In contrast, classification makes sense by grouping things into categories and assigns importance, for example, on the basis of frequency of occurrence. While I did some of the latter, it was for the purpose of heightening awareness through comparison, and possibly finding grounds for more encompassing statements. With a small sample, analysis by this method would not be valid. Rather, I tried to focus on the content of the interviews, including the structure of what was said, words used, what was not said, pauses, repetition and so on to identify and clarify themes. To this end, I often found myself listening to the recordings of interviews for nuances and inflections, rather than just reading the transcripts. The iterative process also meant that the collection and analysis of the data occurred in parallel, not in sequence, and this enabled me to evaluate and prioritise themes in consultation with participants. This was a very important aspect of the methodology; that the analysis of the data took place in discussion with the participants themselves. In the process, I attempted to make explicit participants' tacit knowledge, or what Clandinin & Connelly (2000) call their "personal, practical knowledge", and to explore the emotional aspects of their work.

In attempting extract themes from the data presented, I used the table facility in Microsoft Word to annotate the interview transcripts. I found a wide variety of possible topics emerging. I grouped extracts from different participants which appeared to reflect on similar topics together, and this helped to sharpen themes and topics. But the emergence of the final set of themes and sub-themes as presented in Chapter 5 only emerged after a long process of drafting and redrafting findings, and constantly returning to the actual interview transcripts and recordings.

I needed to be aware of the participants' narratives and of my own, and keep the voices separate. A dilemma can arise where the researcher and participant interpret specific instances differently. On a number of occasions when this happened, we negotiated and reached agreement. There was no occasion where we could not reach an agreed interpretation.

Writing up participant's accounts

In presenting my participant's accounts I have tried to present their experiences *in* education rather than their ideas *about* education in order to understand how the emotional and personal are employed in their everyday work of teaching. I have sought to describe their *personal, practical knowledge*, and I have also tried to locate the findings in the context of teachers' career-long journeys; exploring from angles such as personal and social interactions, past and present experiences and future hopes, as well as the social contexts and forces which shaped them and their work. I have included many extracts from the interviews and made liberal use of participants' own words. In places I have used long extracts from our conversations where this is necessary to present the *gestalt*, the overall, situated picture. In choosing which extracts to include, I have chosen stories, ideas or incidents which elucidate the individual's learning, emotion or tacit knowledge, and which are consistent with his or her overall experiences and beliefs; and also which are of interest in the context of the research questions. In presenting the accounts, I have also included comments to alert the reader to what I believe to be indicators of emerging themes.

Participants' accounts were produced in dialogue with the researcher over a period of time. They were given in a process of knowledge construction, and so participants' views are not always consistent: sometimes participants were exploring inner, unarticulated feelings in the process; in other cases, views expressed were clarified in later conversation. Very importantly, all participants have seen the accounts, most on a number of occasions, and have contributed to their construction. As in Ryan *et al.* (2004), these accounts should not be seen as giving a full representation of any one person, and I have striven not to focus on the individual participants, but to explore in a non-judgemental manner the accounts that they have produced.

In keeping with the narrative approach, I present my participants' accounts in considerable detail in Chapter 4. The purpose is to give voice to my participants; it is also designed so that the reader can examine the accounts (at least in written form) on which the analysis of my findings in Chapter 5 is based, and thus better evaluate my findings.

I also present my account of my own journey for the scrutiny of the reader. This account draws from my own interview and from memory. It is presented in the third person to retain consistency of presentation with the other participants' accounts.

FINDINGS

Introduction

Part B consists of two chapters. In Chapter 4, I present participants' accounts of their career journeys, with their joys and hardships, as experienced and described by them. I have tried to present, not just a description of their current situations, or of them as teachers, but to describe the journey, the pilgrimage, which has taken them to this point in their lives and careers. I also include some of my interpretations of their accounts, and these are identified in the text as comments.

In Chapter 5, I analyse the emerging themes, making comparisons with the literature, and identify some of the lessons from the study. In particular, I attempt to make explicit the tacit knowledge of my participants which is contained in their accounts, and to explore the forces which have shaped them.

My participants

Ben

Ben is a teacher mainly of religion. He has taught for many years in a large, co-educational second-level school in an urban area, and holds the post of year head.

Cathy

Cathy teaches Irish and history in a large, fairly rural, co-educational school. She previously taught in the convent school which amalgamated with other schools in the town to form her current school, so she has a continuous association with the school going back nearly forty years, and holds the post of year head.

Linda

Linda retired a few years ago, having taken work sharing for a number of years prior to that. She taught Irish and German in a small rural, co-educational school for about twenty five years.

Conor

Conor taught maths and science in a small co-educational school until some years ago when the school became a mainly further education provider. He now teaches a range of computer courses to adult students, and is an Assistant Principal.

Robert

Robert has recently retired, having taught practical subjects in a rural co-educational school his entire career. He held the post of year head.

Chapter 4: PARTICIPANTS' ACCOUNTS

Introduction

The career-long journeys which my participants describe in this chapter call to mind the journeys of pilgrims in times gone by. Palmer (2000) describes such life-journeys:

Most of us arrive at a sense of self and vocation only after a long journey through alien lands. But this journey bears no resemblance to the trouble-free 'travel packages' sold by the tourism industry. It is more akin to the ancient tradition of pilgrimage – 'a transformative journey to a sacred centre' full of hardships, darkness and peril. (pp. 17-18)

In the tradition of pilgrimage, these hardships are seen not as accidental but as integral to the journey itself. Such hardships, largely beyond our control, "can strip the ego of the illusion that it is in charge and make space for true self to emerge" (p. 18).

In this chapter, I present my participants' accounts of their personal pilgrimages, with my own comments.

I have tried to present their experiences *in* education rather than their ideas *about* education in order to glimpse how the emotional and personal are intertwined in their everyday work of teaching. I have also tried to understand how their career journey, or pilgrimage, has led them to be the teacher they now are. And so, I have included many extracts from the interviews and made liberal use of participants' own words. As in Ryan *et al.* (2004), I have focused on the accounts, not on the individuals; the accounts do not give a full representation of the individual. I hope that their accounts give a *feeling* for what they have experienced and how they have grown throughout their careers, and how the personal and professional domains interacted in their lives and careers.

I also present my own story for comparison purposes, and also so that the reader can get some perspective on what has led me to doing this particular study.

BEN

Ben has been teaching English and religion now for most of his adult life. For a long time, he has been working in a large, co-educational second-level school in an urban area. For him, becoming a teacher had a certain inevitability about it at, though he had seriously considered and explored other areas such as community work, youth work and religious life. He describes how becoming a teacher was a kind of “natural development” in his life, and in answering my question as to why he became a teacher he added that “what’s maybe more interesting is why I stayed a teacher”. And he answered this question himself by saying that “at this stage I would say I stayed because I really enjoy and sometimes love it”.

Ben was very idealistic when he entered the profession, very committed in particular to Christian ideals, and his “commitment was, in some sense, to build up people through teaching”. For Ben, love is central to growth and, he says that, early in his career “it would have been something that I had in the back of my mind that to really teach people you have to love them”. And this is something he still believes; “really trying to respect and love the people you work with”.

It is clear from speaking to Ben that this commitment to love was a personal commitment by him, and was influenced by his personal beliefs, understandings and values, and also by his family and up-bringing.

The values and idealism which led Ben into teaching have remained the driving force of his practice ever since, particularly in his teaching of religion. He says:

I see religion teaching at that level as talking to young people about life. And to me that is probably the most interesting thing you could teach ... [they learn] an awful lot by learning how to think about things that are important in life.

He describes this as “real education ... helping a young person to realise their own possibilities and then develop them as best they can.”

Later, when talking about his growth as a person and as a teacher, he describes trying to “share that growth with the young people in my classroom”. This concern for “real education” and “connection” with his students is a consistent theme throughout the conversations I had with Ben.

His early years in teaching brought times of stress, anxiety and frustration, but also brought moments of joy and fulfilment. As he describes his career, it is clear that teaching still brings similar emotions. But through the years, he has learned how to

cope better so that the occasions of stress are not as frequent and he can still experience the joy.

Ben's journey

Ben found his first experience of teaching as a substitute teacher abroad “very exciting”, and he worked very hard at trying to connect with his students “at a human level”.

I do remember trying to get some children in different classes to just tell me their story and where they had come from and what they were doing and what they wanted to do. And there were times when I felt it worked and that gave me a great kick.

But he describes his initial teacher training as less than satisfactory.

I don't feel I was at all trained as a teacher. I did the HDip¹⁰ but there was no real, what I would regard as training to teach. So, I think there are a lot of very simple things that I was doing wrong and probably that I continue to do wrong to some extent. But I have managed to correct some of those things.

So, in his early years,

my [class] preparation to some extent would have been maybe over-intellectual. And so I'd come into a class full of what I was going to do but sometimes find it didn't work. And the reason it didn't work was it wasn't prepared for the particular group and at their particular level.

He learned gradually by “by sheer dint of mistakes, effort and so on” to manage his classes, and to retain their interest in the subject. He describes also how he learned a lot from seeing other teachers teach, in particular newly graduated religion teachers or student teachers who had been trained in these skills, and how he would have picked up new skills from them. But, he says:

I would still be aware that I would probably do things as a teacher which, had I picked up certain skills early on, I probably wouldn't do.

So, his journey has not always been easy. While he has always had moments of fulfilment and joy, there were “other days when it was very hard going and I would feel I was getting nowhere and I would feel at times like giving up”, and he would get “very down in himself”. Describing these early years, he says:

¹⁰ The Higher Diploma in Education (HDip) is a one-year postgraduate course which qualifies graduates to become teachers.

I was shouting far too much at the time. I am very aware of that. I was getting far too angry at times and I would say my anxiety levels would have been quite high because, while there were some times when I felt I was being very successful, there were other times when I felt I was getting nowhere. And that was difficult ... part of the pattern of my early years.

While he does describe the difficulties he experienced in his teaching journey, he also describes the joys and satisfaction he has got along the way. He refers to his love of sharing stories, of how he organised retreats for students and how they told their own stories and listened to stories from the bible which would be affirmative, the aim being:

... very much [to] try to get across that young people were loved in some sense and to try and trust this love. And I feel those were very successful and ... I felt that in a way the climax of my teaching for that group for the year was to reach this kind of experience.

There were the second year retreats where the theme was the reality of hurt and the possibility of healing which he again believed “added a huge amount to the total education of those students”.

So, throughout his journey, highs and lows, joy and frustration co-existed always, but in differing balance at different times. He now says there were times when he did not know whether his belief would be affirmed or die totally, and he felt that if it did die, he would no longer be able to teach religion.

But, I found as I struggled as a human being and as a teacher [in] time I grew up through the various things that happened both in family life, life outside and so on, I found that my faith, I suppose, has been strengthened and deepened and as I would see it I have found a peace with where I am. And I think it is out of that peace that my teaching now comes in a much more integrated way than it used to.

He explains the word ‘integrated’ as “my teaching practice being in line with my personal beliefs.” Also, his beliefs are more integrated. He sees his place in the Christian theological tradition and is content within this. He adds, however, that “I’d be, I suppose, realistic and truthful enough to acknowledge that that might not stay”. Looking back on his career, he says:

I think there's no doubt, there's great satisfaction and joy that a teacher gets from satisfactory classroom experience. And often to get to that stage a teacher probably has to go through some difficult times.

He adds that developing personal awareness, an ability to deal with conflict, and an ability to be “a little bit removed from ... your direct relationship with the child,

particularly if it's an angry relationship" are important in getting through these difficulties.

Comment: Ben's description of his career indicates an unfinished personal and professional struggle to find ways in which the love he had for his students could infuse his practice and be experienced by them.

Personal commitment

As Ben describes his journey, it is clear that his teaching is integral to his life. His is not a detached, professional career, but one in which he has made a large personal investment. Teaching is part of his life. His professionalism is very much bound up with his personhood. This links with what a colleague said when we were discussing my ideas for this study. He likened the situation to a motor car.

The personal is the chassis, and the professional is the body of the car. The two do not exist separately, and the professional is built on the chassis of the personal.

This commitment of the personal to the professional sphere has significant implications for teachers. For Ben, it brought him into conflict with school managements, with far-reaching implications for him. His contract in his first school was not renewed because of his work in the community with a group of young people whose families were looked on with suspicion by the school authorities, and this almost cost him his career as a religion teacher. His contract was not renewed, and he ended up without a job in teaching for a year. He describes the circumstances in which he later left another school as follows:

I left there because I felt I had to leave because I had been involved with a number of young people who had been messing about with drugs. I felt I had worked very positively with them and some of the parents. And I thought I was working positively with the school management on this process but I came back that September to realise that the particular students had been expelled. And I felt I couldn't go on as a Christian teacher at that school ...

Comment: It is clear that a values based commitment by a teacher is not always welcomed by school managements. Values based commitment is risky. It falls into the general theme of conflict between agency and structure. Ben's experience is evidence that his "agency" was unwelcome to management in one school, and was either not valued or just dismissed in the other.

On the more mundane level of the everyday practice of teaching, but with perhaps greater implications in the long term, there are numerous examples throughout our

conversations which show Ben's investment of his own personhood in the performance of his teaching; instances where he has struggled to make human connection with individuals or class groups, or where he has tried to maintain relationships in situations which he found difficult, and he has instanced times where these struggles have spilled over into the domain of family life. He describes how, at a difficult time in his career,

I was lucky enough that I have a good solid support system in my wife particularly and she said look you have to do something about this and I did go for help and I did get help. And I did seriously consider giving up teaching, at least for a while. But with the help that I got I was able to have myself in some sense recharged.

He has engaged in significant ongoing personal development and nourishment throughout his career which has been, at least partly, aimed at coming to terms with issues arising from his teaching.

Well I think even if you look at the history of western education and you go back to somebody like Socrates all the great educators have seen education as deeply personal and making people think at quite a deep level. Now if you are to do that on a regular basis in a classroom you do need to nourish your own personal growth and development because I don't think one can happen without the other, it's impossible ... and I think a lot of teachers do exhaust themselves and cause a lot of damage in classrooms because they haven't done this.

He says that at present in his school, the more senior religion teachers prefer to teach religion as an exam subject, so that it is now being taught as a non-exam subject by teachers who are newer in the school. This, he says, is because religion is seen as a difficult subject to teach. But he also feels that having a syllabus and a final examination introduces an element of instrumentalism into teaching and learning which makes the job easier, and which provides boundaries for the personal involvement which is required (Conor refers to this also, p. 91).

Comment: In this regard, the fact that teachers, who had received better training than Ben, are unwilling to teach senior religion as a non-exam subject is an indication that teaching skills are not enough to make a good teacher. The essence of teaching comes from the selfhood of the teacher.

Staffroom culture, nourishment and growth

Ben's experiences of staffroom culture have been mixed. He describes one very telling episode from a time early in his career when he was struggling as a teacher.

I remember one older teacher in [the school] saying to me shortly after Christmas of the first year I was teaching there how he was amazed that I had survived because he had probably been aware of the difficulties I was having. Not through me telling him but through him over-hearing probably what was going on in my classroom, and I remember feeling rather bitter; and I think it is interesting too in terms of teachers supporting one another that he said that to me then, but he never offered me any support or comfort or help.

Later, he adds:

I would have grown up in the culture [where] if you were to express how badly you were getting on it was seen as a negative thing, so there was a lot of that in me as well. So [for a lot of my career] I was very slow to look for help ... and I certainly would have not have talked to my then principal because I would have felt he wouldn't understand.

Comment: Ben's experience here is echoed by other participants in the study. Teachers do observe colleagues having difficulties, but the culture of openness and trust which would allow support for teachers who are experiencing difficulties is not there in many staffrooms. The pervasiveness of this culture is evidenced by the fact that Ben accepted the situation for a long time. It has changed for him in recent years, as described below.

He recognises that in teaching, "your personality does become very exposed and that, at times, is dangerous"; dangerous for the teacher and for the quality of the education for students also. So as he has grown as a person and as a teacher, he is now "hugely committed to trying to help create a set up in our own school where teachers are nourished, where teachers have a sense of trying to look after themselves". He sees this as vital for both teachers and students because of "the very centrality of the interaction between teacher and student within the classroom".

And if that is angry or if it's in some way releasing anxiety or negativity from the teacher's point of view it automatically damages the fabric of the classroom atmosphere. And then the opposite side of that is where the teacher is nourished and the teacher is bringing in joy and positivity into a classroom it totally changes the atmosphere. It lifts everybody.

Ben believes that there is a great need for some form of supervision for teachers, for someone to talk to about particularly difficult situations, along the lines available to counsellors.

One of the ways he tries to promote a nourishing staffroom culture is by avoiding situations of "negative talk ... I will try and turn it towards something positive. And

sometimes I find with quite negative people, when you turn it, you can actually get quite valuable stuff going on then”.

He relates some positive staffroom experiences which he has had. He refers to a time “when I hit the biggest brick wall I hit, I know I did not want nor did I look for particular support among my colleagues or my teaching circle; I looked outside it.”

Ben talks about how a new principal influenced staffroom culture. This man emphasised that “we are all making mistakes but we can all grow together” and that “the sum of what we are as a team is much more than what we are as individuals”. He encouraged senior teachers to look after young teachers in an informal mentoring capacity, and he encouraged young teachers to speak openly about difficulties they were having. And Ben says:

From a culture where, by and large, many of the school people were very slow to admit difficulties, we now have, I would say, quite an open culture where people are much more open to actually acknowledging [that] “I find this class very difficult” ... And also, people are now much more ready to offer suggestions of what's working for them in the classroom whereas before people would be slow enough to suggest that.

He describes the loose group of teachers who come and go at the table where he mostly sits in the staffroom as very positive. When they talk about school, it is often about “their own work and how they can progress it particularly with particular groups of students”. He adds:

... there tends to be a lot of humour about it, if something funny happens in the classroom. And to me that kind of talk, particularly the humorous stuff is very positive and very, I think it's community building in terms of teachers.

Ben believes that it is vital for teachers to nourish themselves, and that the staffroom culture is very important to this. He also instances subject meetings as being potentially very supportive provided there is good leadership there. He also believes that the summer holidays “give you an opportunity to kind of rebuild yourself and over the years I would certainly have seen that as vital to my own teaching life”. He says all teachers have a responsibility to provide self-nourishment. This may be achieved by participation in sport, or by a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

But I do think, as a community, teachers need to look at this quite seriously and I think a lot of teachers do exhaust themselves and cause a lot of damage in classrooms because they haven't done this.

Professionalism

He sees professionalism as “having the skills necessary to make decisions for yourself in your teaching; to recognise that you’re the expert in the sense that you should trust your own judgement.” This judgement should be informed and tested in discussion and collaboration with others.

Relationships

Throughout our conversations, Ben gave many examples from his practice which are based on human, personal relationships between him and his students, individually or as groups. For example, in the retreats referred to above, the nature of the themes are such that they can only be broached within a safe, trusting environment. Indeed, not only the relationships between him and his students are important here, but also the kind of relationships he fosters among the students themselves within the group. In other places he refers to his own human responses and reactions to the events in his classrooms; reactions of joy, “getting a kick out of it”, love, anger, anxiety, and self-doubt. In another place he talks of teaching as an art, “but it is kind of deeper than that ... there are things that just work between human beings”. In the classroom there are things that are planned, but there are other things which just happen which he calls “opportune moments” where it is possible to make a connection with a student or group “and when they now come, I feel I am very open to taking them”. Such moments are very important in any human relationships, and the fact that Ben seeks them out is illustrative of the kind of relationships he wishes to have with his students.

As we discussed relationships between teacher and students and teacher and class, Ben agreed that developing and maintaining good relationships is probably the biggest challenge to teachers (see also Conor, p. 94). He added:

The reality is that in any given staff you will have presumably a number of teachers who, certainly in my limited view, would not be in happy positions and tend to cause negative reactions in their classes. And there doesn't seem to be any real system of dealing with this adequately.

Robert made a similar observation (p. 101). As we explored how to define ‘good’ or ‘weak’ teachers, Ben added that “there must be a place in the education system for teachers who are ordinary, not only for those who are top class; there should be a place for everybody, students and teachers”. He did add that this does not include every teacher.

Comment: This observation about “teachers who are ordinary” relates to the nature of teaching. Teaching is ordinary in many respects. It is largely in the everyday, mundane, human interactions between teacher and student that the quality of the teaching is defined. As in all human relationships in families and elsewhere, there are highs and lows with occasional flashpoints, and how these are managed is important; but it is in the everyday interactions that the quality of the relationship is defined. Thus, as well as “mixed ability classes”, we also have “mixed ability teachers”! All teachers (myself included) cause problems at times – different teachers being ‘good’ or ‘weak’ in different situations or at different times.

In one of our conversations he gave an example which illustrates the complexity of the teacher’s job of maintaining relationships.

Maybe actually a good example [is] something that happened today which is nearly an opposite experience [to an opportune moment]. One of the groups I have at the moment who drive me a bit demented at times and I find quite difficult, they're a second year group who have quite a number of difficult people in it. They're a weak group and they are very noisy but there is one particular girl who – I like her a lot, I taught her mother. I felt I would get on very well with this girl even though I knew she has difficulties. But I find I am fighting with her a lot and she is throwing tantrums in response. I am not handling it very well and today I was determined, [but] I knew as the class developed that it was going to be one of those noisy days. And because I was a bit tired I certainly wasn't at my best, but I felt I am not going to let this get beyond me. So I went ahead anyway with the class but every so often I would be giving out I suppose to various people which isn't a great idea but this is what I was doing. And this girl was part of this even though I was trying purposely to sort of not be negative towards her because I knew I'd get the backlash. But in the end she was one of three that I kept behind. Now I only intended to keep them behind for a minute and immediately the others had left, it was lunchtime. And the other two were quite accepting of being kept behind but this particular girl was giving out immediately. So I did quite a silly thing; I let the other two go and kept herself and of course she threw a tantrum, and I wanted her journal. She threw the journal at me and in the end I let her go very fast. But I kind of nearly amused myself at the fact that I didn't lose the head with her which was very important. But I did in a sense lose the battle. But that to me was not that much of a negative moment but it ... certainly wasn't a good moment ... Now I would hope that before too long I will re-establish my relationship with [that] girl. I'm not sure how that will work or what will make it happen but I'll be looking for opportunities and I expect they will come.

Comment: This little story illustrates the kind of issues that teachers face on an almost daily basis. In it Ben acknowledges, that after so many years teaching, and despite being at peace with where he is (pg. 63), he still finds certain groups difficult.

And the difficulties he finds relate to the personal/ relational aspect of the work. The challenge is to the person of the teacher as well as to the office of the teacher; it was Ben, the person, who was at risk of being upset, not just some professional Ben, the teacher. The student's reaction can have quite complicated origins which makes it difficult to deal with. It is not easy to deal with individual issues in front of a group. Indeed, it can sometimes be the dynamic of the group that propels an individual to such behaviour. The structure of schools does not allow much opportunity for teachers to address ongoing issues such as Ben's relationship with this girl other than in the classroom, where it is not easy to address. This is the context for his acknowledgement of the ongoing nature of the difficulties, and his unhappiness with the situation. Such ongoing difficulties in relationships with classes or individuals can be a source of stress and anxiety for teachers. And his relatively poor handling of the situation on this particular day, at least partly because he was feeling tired, is an illustration of the centrality of the teacher's selfhood in the process of teaching. Yet, despite realising the situation was deteriorating, he had to carry on and manage the class as best he could. And his restraint in "not losing the head" in spite of being personally and professionally insulted and perhaps hurt was very important for his long-term aim of re-establishing his rapport with this girl. Underpinning his reaction to this minor incident is his "love" for his students, his deep desire to help them grow, and his own strength as a person, the result of personal and professional growth reached through much joy, anguish and pain over many years. He admits that as a young teacher he might have reacted very differently.

Yes and I did have situations as a younger teacher where I would get personally very upset and respond to a student out of that upset. And I would go home feeling very badly because of it.

Dealing with such situations requires a great deal of personal as well as professional strength and maturity.

This story also gives an indication of the immediacy and intensity of the classroom, and its potential for serious hurt on both student and teacher. It is easy to imagine the hurt this girl might have experienced in the situation had it been handled differently (indeed, she might have experienced considerable hurt as it was). It is equally easy to imagine the hurt the teacher might have experienced, and how that might have inflamed the situation. The need for resilience on the part of the teacher, to be continually nourished, not to become worn down is easy to understand when considered in this light.

Summary

Ben's story is one of a career-long struggle. But it is a struggle of love with lots of joy as well as lots of pain. His struggle is essentially to find ways in which the love he bears for his students can be communicated to them in ways that are affirming and life-enhancing for them. His development as a teacher is intimately linked with his own development as a person, and he tries to share his own growth with his students. So, his very selfhood is employed centrally in his teaching. In trying to help his students to recognise love and joy in their own lives, and to recognise hurt and loss and experience the possibility of healing, he shares (within the boundaries of safety for him and them) these personal emotions with his students. He recognises the complexity of the relationships involved between him and his class groups and individual students, and recognises that at times he can be hurt in these relationships, but that it is part of his job as the adult/teacher to be able to respond without acting out of that hurt.

CATHY

Early days

Cathy decided to become a teacher based on the results of her Leaving Certificate¹¹. At that time the range of possibilities for a career was fairly narrow; “you had nursing, teaching or going into an office”. During her college years, teaching was always the goal. “I actually [never] gave much thought to any other type of job”.

After completing her higher Diploma in Education, Cathy got a job in a rural convent secondary school where she still teaches. At first it was a job, but “as I got into teaching I got more interested in teaching”. She came to see “the job [as] far more than teaching really. You saw it about ... children; it was moulding people’s lives, it was the impact you were having on people’s lives”.

She found in her early years that “preparation was very tough ... [the school] was very exam orientated always ... and I found the pressure to have the kids perform was pretty tough”. The job was very different to what her concept of it was from her own schooldays.

... you know the way you thought you went into school and then you came home and there was nothing more to it. But sure there was so much more to it really. And it was way more than the 4 o’clock job. And I think as the years are going on it is becoming more and more, more than a 4 o’clock job.

Cathy did not find discipline a problem when she started.

There was no discipline problems really – we thought there were mind you ... but looking back they were absolute angels, you know, they really were. Now we were a lot tougher on them, you know ... but teachers still got into trouble, terrible trouble with kids ... I suppose what would be termed now personality clashes.

Comment: Her phraseology here, indicating that it was teachers who got into trouble with students, and that personality clashes were the likely causes, indicates the personal involvement of the teacher in teaching.

Looking back now, she reflects:

¹¹ The Leaving Certificate is the terminal examination for second-level students in Ireland. Qualification of entry into third-level is based on students’ achievement in this examination.

When we were severe on kids in my early years teaching, that came from my own inadequacies ... very much afraid of the class going out of control, very much afraid of being seen not being able to do your job. And, of course, a terrible lack of self-esteem ... on my part.

Comment: Personal feelings and qualities are to the fore here; fear, pride, self-esteem, need for respect from colleagues.

Creating an identity as a teacher

Cathy has made a huge personal and professional investment in her career and in her school, and her identity is linked with the school. She tells the students that when she retires, “my ghost will walk the corridors!” She has taught the parents of many of the children. She remembers the history of the school; she has been part of its development over many years. She thinks these things make her “different” (and so impact on her identity as a teacher).

Her self-esteem as a teacher is very linked to her ability to get exam results. She finds exams the most stressful aspect of her work, trying to keep her results “up with the national average or to keep above the national average”. She says:

... you know you talk about going to school and you talk about the development of the individual, [but] giving them that certificate for life walking out the door is the most you can ever do for them. And I know you could have been very nice to them. I know ... that they might have had a grand easy run through the school but if you haven't prepared them for life with that certificate ... you have done very little for them ... because no matter what they're going to do, they're going to go back to that certificate ...

This is a constant theme throughout our conversations. Speaking about her lack of self-esteem in the early years, she says:

Then, as you went through teaching, there was a growing confidence, really. It didn't happen overnight, but it grew; you knew what you could achieve. Results, and no matter what they say about them, they are a great indicator of how you are working in terms of getting them through exams. It's not so easy to quantify how you are dealing with people.

As she gained confidence she became more relaxed in the job; “you don't take as much notice if kids don't like you – well, so what? You will always have that.” And her relationships with students developed as a result.

Definitely my relationship with students has changed because I feel a lot more confident with them. If they are weak I can promise them that if they do their bit of work, I will get them through their exam.

While exam results provides a solid basis on which to build her confidence and identity as a teacher, it is clear from what she says that her view of teaching is more nuanced. For example, she says that growing in confidence enabled her to deal differently with difficult students.

You may try and talk to the child and say 'look, we'll try and resolve our differences – we have to live with each other for the next four or five years. And I found that very helpful. If you challenged them and ask what's really wrong, what's going wrong between us and we have to deal with this – are we going to fight for the rest of the time? That I found very good, now.

Comment: this comment shows that as she grew more confident as a teacher, her relationships with her students became more authentic.

When her school was amalgamated with the other schools in the town midway in her career, it challenged many of the assumptions which underpinned her teaching. One of the important issues which had to be reconciled at the time was the question of extra-curricular activities, mainly games. The amalgamating schools all had very different cultures and traditions in this regard. Hers was very exam focused. “[our principal] wouldn't countenance kids being gone off to matches when they should be in school studying” . The other schools had big traditions in games, and this became an issue during the amalgamation process.

Having kids missing out of classes was absolutely huge, for me and for an awful lot of the teachers from the convent ... how are you going to make up the time with them ... it was an awful culture shock for us.

Cathy personally had been very friendly with some of the staff from the other schools and this now it became an issue to be resolved between them. There were gender issues because it was boys who played most of the games, and the male teachers who were mostly involved.

So, it was all little conflicts like that ... and then another thing that used to cause a lot of friction was that people [teachers] who were out doing games were perceived to be having the fine time ... That used to cause a lot of friction too.

These were big issues between her and some of her friends. But in time she came to recognise the value of games and extra curricular activities.

funnily enough over the years – and it's a pity somebody didn't take a record of this – but kids who were involved in games ... even though they were missing for testing and everything, they did as well, if not better than the kids with their heads stuck in the books and ... then of course you see there's an awful lot to be said for games for kids; it keeps them going to school, and it socialises them

within their own age group. There's nothing worse for a child to be catapulted into an adult world when they're not ready really.

In time she came to participate fully in extra-curricular activities with the students, to value them and to enjoy them, though some tensions still exists around this issue: “we still quibble about kids missing from class but girls are missing as often as boys now”.

Teaching mixed classes was also a “huge” challenge arising from the amalgamation, and was also one which she came to embrace and which led to professional growth.

Comment: Cathy's experiences of the amalgamation show how she not only adapted, but came to embrace a wider vision and practice. This has significance when considered in the context of the Irish second-level system where many teachers, once they obtain a permanent position, remain in the same school for the rest of their career.

Teaching methodologies

Developing new teaching methodologies throughout her career is a recurring theme throughout my conversations with Cathy. She says: “before you could make them sit down in class, you could make them learn the stuff ... but it's not working any more”. This is because “kids learn more from television than they ever do from talking to people. The visual has more of an impact now.” She feels that children's concentration is not as good as it used to be and that second-level teachers have to deal with a wider range of abilities. So, in recent years she has been trying ways to get her students more “active”, more “involved” in classes. And this “is a huge change for me”, and quite a challenge.

Group work is what I am trying but I am finding it ... very, very hard because, unless you catch them in first year and get them into the modus operandi, they think this is a chat.

When we met at the beginning of her summer holidays, she was in the process of preparing a whole new set of lessons on PowerPoint for the coming year. Yet, she is uncertain of the outcome of her efforts.

You know, there's a ... whole load of issues that [might] come up in this; I [might] find myself saying 'why in the name of God did I change from my old way of doing it, didn't it always work' type of thing.

The school has changed to mixed ability classes in the last while, and this is a major motivating factor for her in trying these new approaches.

But it's not working in the classroom any more to go in and dish out information and expect them to just [learn it], the mug and jug type of thing ... We definitely have to change if we want to keep mixed ability and it looks like it's here to stay

Comment: Cathy sees it as her job to find new ways of teaching that will engage her students with the subject and motivate and enable them to learn. This requires her to take risks, to try things she finds difficult and which may not work and, in the process, to make herself vulnerable. Ben, (p. 69) and Linda (p. 87) also give examples of risk-taking.

Staffroom culture

Cathy's experiences of staffrooms have been very interesting. She remembers her early years very fondly, in a staff where the majority were nuns and where she got a great training in teaching. She says "it was all inclusive, you were part of the family. Not alone had you to care but you had to be seen to care. They were very, very good to us in terms of minding us [and] steering us the right way"; the nuns would take the young teachers aside if they thought they were struggling.

Her experience of staffroom culture now is quite different to that.

She acknowledges that many teachers struggle at times with their teaching, and she feels that "for a young teacher it can be very stressful". Recalling her own lack of self-esteem as a younger teacher, she says:

And I can recognise it in some of the younger teachers in school at the moment ... young teachers [are] very slow to ask you for help ... because those kids are out there struggling, looking for a job. And they're afraid. They don't know me from Adam. They're terrified that I'll report this to the principal; 'look, she doesn't know what she is about' ... I think they just try and cover it up and pretend everything is all right.

Even where it is clear that a teacher is struggling, she does not think anybody from the school management takes the teacher aside to talk to them or to give support. Would she see it as her place, as assistant principal, to do so?

To be very truthful with you, I wouldn't; I would be very, very slow to offer my opinion to one of the younger teachers. Very, very slow, you know. Because I have a feeling that they ... would resent it. Now I could be totally wrong ... because I have never tried it out.

When asked if she saw herself now in the role that the nuns had in the staffroom when she was a young teacher, she was emphatic: "Definitely not, not at all. No way".

And it is not only younger teachers who are slow to admit to having difficulties in their work. “I think all the teachers, even the more seasoned ones are afraid that the blame [for having difficulties] will be pinpointed on themselves”. She adds:

And even for myself now, I'd be slow enough really in the sense they'd say, 'Why doesn't that one retire from the job. She is way gone past it'. And that's the truth of it now ... I know one of the teachers, she'd say something at a staff meeting and somebody would disagree with her and she'd say 'Oh well. I am only here 30 something years and nobody listens to me any more. My opinion is of no value in this school any more', and that type of thing, you know ... there's a grain of feeling there of, I won't say rejection, but ...

Cathy says that what gave her most pain in her career was occasionally when she felt “put-down”. And this experience would have been from colleagues, not students or parents. “I have no degree in history and comments like ‘people without degrees in a subject should not be teaching them’ were very hurtful.” (This was said with feeling).

She does refer to subject meetings as being potentially helpful, but as not having been used to maximum benefit.

Subject meetings were a great idea, but we kind of wasted our time, I think. We spent our time [deciding when we would do certain aspects of the course], where, I think, the subject meetings should have been arranged in such a way that you plan lessons.

Comment: This reinforces the view expressed by Ben, (p. 67).

In the past, she did work closely with one other teacher. “We swapped lessons. We’d work on projects together, we’d go out in the field together ... it was absolutely brilliant”. And this is the kind of work she feels would be beneficial in subject meetings.

Like most of the other participants, Cathy, in her whole career, never saw another teacher teaching, and no other teacher ever saw her.

Comment: Cathy’s experiences suggest a staffroom culture where fear, blame and distrust are common, where teaching is seen as a private matter, and where there is little collegiality; where everybody knows that everybody else is struggling to do their best, but this struggle is unacknowledged and where failure is seen as culpable rather than part of struggle. And all of this where there are many good friends.

Cathy's view of teaching

Despite her focus on examinations, she also recognises and works towards a wider educational agenda. Ever since her school amalgamated, she has contributed significantly to extra-curricular activities, in particular to school plays. She describes her involvement as “one of the big joys” of her teaching career.

We used to have a great time really ... the musical was always a marvellous thing. I always felt it was absolutely marvellous for the kids ... it was a great educational experience. It bonded fifth years, they never forgot it. If you meet them today the musical is the thing they talk about – they forget about other things, you know ...

She describes it as “like indiscipline within a discipline ... they were able to relax [and] be themselves”. The students “loved” it, and she could get to know them in a different way.

Cathy's wider view of teaching is demonstrated also in the way she describes how she carries out her role as assistant principal.

... you have very little time to do that job really. So, the way I come around it is I walk down for my dinner everyday and I meet them going down the street and they catch up with you sometimes and they talk to you ... and you kind of develop some little bit of friendship with them. I do yard duty in the mornings because you catch them again and ... they will dawdle in the yard to talk to you for a while So, they are just extra times when they don't feel that you're really talking to them as a teacher ... You're just talking about something like, 'are you tired' or 'it's an awful morning' and you might lead on from there ... But it's not seen as the teacher quizzing the pupil ... We have very little time, a lot of our time then goes to deal with the paperwork and sort out the files and do that type of thing.

It shows how she makes herself available to students for a chat, for a personal encounter, and how she sees this personal care fitting into her professional role. It also shows how she enjoys and feels at ease in the company of young people, something that seems to be common to my participants. And it indicates that she sees paperwork as a burden, taking from the time she would otherwise have to work directly with students.

Comment: This little vignette tells a lot about how Cathy sees her job. It shows that forming relationships with students is one of her values as a teacher; and it shows how she finds opportunities to live this value in her practice. These relationships are *part of* as well as the *context* for their education.

The fact that Cathy enjoys and feels at ease in the company of young people is significant given that teachers probably spend more time in the company of young people than any other adults

Professionalism and Accountability

For Cathy, professionalism and accountability are closely linked. She sees professionalism in the form of increased bureaucracy, and she sees accountability as something going upwards; she feels accountable to the principal and to the inspectors, and sees her principal as being accountable to the Department of Education and Science.

Sometimes I think that the whole focus now is on propping up management and we're losing sight of what we're about. If I can explain that a little bit better; all our time is going on marking exercises and filling in rolls and making sure their homework journals [are filled in] so that if an inspector walks in, the work is written down and they are accountable, you're accountable, everybody is accountable you know. That's taking an awful lot of time. It's taking away valuable time where you could use it differently with the children, you know.

Comment: So, the form of accountability she experiences is one which detracts from her time and opportunity to form relationships with her students.

Cathy also sees the discipline system being driven by the need to be accountable in the case of a few disruptive students; “you need accountability for 4 or 5 students, the rest go through no problem”. And she does not like it.

Oh absolutely. I think so really ... Or it's like ... all the report forms and the report forms and the complaint forms and another complaint form and another complaint form. And what you're really trying to do is get the child to behave themselves. But that part of it seems to get lost in the piling up of the complaint forms. I know you have to have the evidence ... but really you're piling sin upon sin like, aren't you? I don't like hearing things like that about how I was day after day anyway.

Comment: This observation was made with feeling. It shows a depth of care, understanding and love for children and a sense that the demands of the system are in some ways unfair and cruel to children. It also suggests that she sees the system as legalistic; that a system based on relationship might be more effective, but that “you have to have the evidence”. It is clear that it does not sit comfortably with her values as a teacher.

She explains how child protection guidelines, though necessary, have impacted on her work:

For example, this girl now, who is very demonstrative, and she could run up and hug you, and she might do this in front of the whole corridor, [and you'd be thinking] 'please, please don't do this'; there was a fear instilled in us during those times that will not go away.

In this story, there is sadness in her voice that procedures prevent her responding in a human way to the girl. Here, she finds herself responding out of fear.

Summary

Cathy is a teacher approaching retirement. She demonstrates a wealth of 'personal, practical knowledge' which she has accumulated throughout her career. This manifests itself in deep insights and understandings of young people, their feelings, their joys, hopes and fears, what motivates them and how they learn. It also manifests itself in her understanding of how her school structures are experienced by students, and in how she has developed her own role in mediating between the demands of these structures and the needs of her students. Her concern for them is clear throughout. In the staffroom, she has experienced very little collegiality throughout her career.

LINDA

For as long as she can remember, Linda always wanted to be a teacher. “I really don’t remember a time in my life when I didn’t want to be a teacher. So, that was my only goal in life with regard to career growing up”, she says. She remembers as a small girl playing teacher with her dolls. Her initial idea was to be a primary teacher, but a local teacher advised her mother that, if she went for primary teaching, she would “only be an NT”, and that she would be better to do a BA which would give her options if she did not like teaching. She still regrets a little that she did not follow her dream. “I still feel to this day I would probably have made a better primary teacher than I did secondary”.

After she began teaching in a small rural school, Linda did her Higher Diploma in Education in the evening time. Later she went abroad to teach in Africa for a number of years, and then returned to another small rural school where she taught until she took early retirement a few years ago.

Early years

Linda really enjoyed her early years. She recalls in particular mixing with the students then.

I loved being with the students and doing things with them ... We went on foreign trips ... and we’d have hops¹² at Christmas and Easter and ... I would be mad to be in the middle of it and ... dancing with them. Now that changed as I got older.

As regards her early classroom experiences, she felt she got on well with most of her classes, but recalls one particularly troublesome class which she, and all the teachers in the school, found very difficult to handle. She recalls for the first year or two that she would feel “dread going in to them”. However, as she grew into the job, she came to manage the situation better. But she found that she had very little help in growing into the job.

Really, the H Dip doesn't teach you how to teach, number one, and how to deal with discipline or anything like that, number two. You just find your own way eventually.

¹² Dances

Interviewer: Yeah I am interested in that. How do you think teachers learn how to teach?

Trial and error I suppose. But as well as that I suppose your own thinking on it. I suppose you know the first year maybe you are kind of afraid – you're the junior teacher in the staff and you are kind of afraid to be seen as the weakling.

So, in the early years, neither the HDip nor her colleagues on the staff were particularly helpful to her in finding ways to deal with the issues which were causing her concern. She describes the process of 'growing into the job' in a number of ways: trial and error; learning to deal with students as individuals within the class group "which you are maybe not inclined to [do] as a young teacher in your early days"; experience of having met something before which might not have worked out, and trying a different approach this time; and crucially, becoming more confident in herself. Other elements of 'growing into the job' included, for Linda, becoming more familiar with what she was teaching, preparing and revising notes for classes and, over a long period of years, discovering new, more student centred teaching methodologies. Her growth as a teacher was a gradual process – there was "no big road to Damascus" event. You learn ways that will work for you eventually; maybe not fully but [will] help anyway".

Linda describes the years in Africa as the best years of her life. Her students were motivated, and the education they were receiving had the potential to make a huge difference in their lives.

Comment: In her early years, Linda really enjoyed working with her students and, in a sense, sharing her life with them. But learning how to teach, how to be a teacher, was something she had to do mostly by herself.

Linda's motivation

Linda describes her motivation as a teacher as "basically ... to see them [her students] develop as people ...particularly kids with learning difficulties".

You'd love to see them making a little bit of progress and ... feeling that sense of achievement that 'I can do this', and growing in self-esteem and self-confidence. I think [that] would be my thing.

She describes herself as a "kind of helper by nature" who "looks out for the underdog". She is clearly driven by a personal commitment to care for her students and she says "I wanted to give of myself because others had given of themselves to me." Throughout our conversations her desire to help her students develop their self-

esteem is a recurring theme, and her greatest satisfaction came she “helped a child or spoke to a child”. Even when she would sit, helping a child and maybe “getting nowhere”, “at least you would feel you gave him a bit of time ... and maybe that will help him to think that he is worth it” even if the progress in the subject is small.

... the fact that you gave the person time, I mean, it's when someone sits down and gives you their time, it helps you know. ... it gives you some bit of a boost. So, from that point of view I suppose maybe it would have helped even though academically it probably didn't you know.

Comment: Here, she seems to indicate that her personal relationship with her students is not only the *context* within which her teaching takes place, but is in fact also *part of* the student' learning and growth. Later, on reading this comment, she agreed.

Linda was always concerned to treat her students, particularly the weaker ones, as she would have liked her own children to be treated in similar circumstances.

I think once I had my own children, my own first child even, I would have been certainly very conscious of ... bringing on kids, because I would say 'if that was my child's teacher I would like them to go down and help them out or you know, get them over that or give them the time'. So I was ... using that really as the ... criterion for helping other kids.

Comment: As with Conor and Ben, personal and family experiences influenced her development and behaviour in the job.

She acknowledges that this type of commitment might have caused her some stress, and that this would arise from a sense,

... that maybe you would say 'I am never really going to make a mark on him ... he is never going to make progress' and so you would be frustrated from that point of view.

However, she adds that the “enjoyment and fulfilment of your own desires” which her commitment gave her, outweighed the stress.

Comment: Throughout this section Linda shows that caring is an important value for her, and gives her joy. But she has to struggle in her practice to reconcile her caring with the competitive academic atmosphere of school.

She sees teachers' personalities as important in their teaching. “We all bring our own personality to the class and our own way of dealing with things”. Having a mix of teachers of different ages on the staff also “gives students a wide range [of experiences]” because we bring different things to the job at different stages in our

careers. She sees (and remembers) how students can relate very closely to young teachers, and also the enthusiasm and energy young teachers bring. However, she can also see the value of what older teachers bring.

I suppose we grew away from them in the sense of age versus youth, but I suppose emotionally we were even more mature and even more enthusiastic for them.

Struggles, loneliness and isolation

She says her greatest satisfaction in teaching came from seeing students growing in confidence. And she speaks emotionally about her feelings of regret and guilt relating to a few occasions where her actions might have had the opposite effect. She adds that generally, “if I meet a past pupil now ... I nearly always say ‘oh my God, I hope he has a good opinion of me after teaching him for two or three years’”. Saying that her main motivation was to help her students to develop as rounded individuals with positive self-image, she adds, on one occasion in our conversations, “I am sure I failed miserably most of the time”.

A number of aspects of Linda’s work caused her deep frustration. One such aspect was that “education is so exam-centred that I think we lose track of the child-centeredness in it” and “that would have frustrated me totally”. She says:

... you see we were nearly driven by courses. I felt very frustrated over the years, especially at Leaving Cert level. It was so intensive really ... to get them to get their Leaving Cert, to get them through an exam, to get them ... the points you know. And, like, I felt in latter years that I was teaching by photocopier. I hadn’t the time with, say, poetry or something like that, to develop it as I would love to have done it. Instead of that we read the poem, we explained it, I gave them notes about it, they digested the notes and they regurgitated them and that was it. Now that wasn’t teaching ... as I would have liked it.

She tried to counterbalance this by telling her students that everybody’s interpretation of the poem was valid. “I suppose I was giving them the idea that, well, their opinion about it is valid as well”, but that for examination purposes it was not possible to develop that as she would have liked.

Throughout most of her career she taught fifth and sixth year students combined in some of her classes. She always found this difficult; “it was difficult to keep each group working and busy”. Managing the combined groups was a challenge which persisted throughout her career.

Comment: There are indications here in Linda's descriptions of the tensions she tried to juggle with during her career, and that some of these persisted, unresolved throughout her career.

In the first half of her career, Linda described herself as using "the traditional methods of teaching". She describes these as "real drudgery". With the advent of new syllabi and greater emphasis on the communicative aspects of language, she came across new, more relevant and more student-centred methodologies. Initially she was sceptical about these and concerned that they might result in discipline problems, but she came to embrace and enjoy them.

I saw really the benefit of that you know, after, because kids loved it ... it was a great way of getting them to have some bit of interest in the class and maybe a bit of enjoyment you know. And that Irish can go out into the world ... it wasn't just for the classroom.

And, despite her initial fears and scepticism, she says it helped her "to grow into the job". But, in our conversations on methodology, she repeated a number of times a belief that she was not very creative in regard to teaching methodologies.

Comment: Throughout our conversations, Linda's focus on the technical aspects of teaching always seemed to be secondary to her focus on caring.

Linda spent many hours every night correcting her students' homework. At in-service courses, she often heard the advice that when correcting work, she should focus on one element, for example, tenses, and only correct these. But she did not follow this advice.

I had a theory about correcting homework and it was if a child, a student, you know, took the time and made the effort to do his or her homework, it deserved the dignity of being corrected. And ... I would go through every line of everything, which I suppose was useless in a way because the student was kind of never going to look through it again in that kind of intense way.

Comment: This indicates that her value of care and respect for students demanded that she do more than treat the homework for its instrumental use. It demanded that she use the opportunity to demonstrate her respect for it and for them, at a heavy personal cost..

Staffroom & collegiality

Linda says; "I suppose what I loved about staffrooms was the collegiality and the bit of craic". The staffroom was a place to de-stress, to "get away from the tensions of the

class". She found this to be very necessary, maybe after "a frustrating morning or ... heading into a frustrating post-break session". She also says that when she had any difficulties with a student that she could always discuss it with one of her colleagues and that that would be helpful.

However, she did not have much experience of planning lessons with other teachers. Partly this was due to the fact that she was the only teacher of one of her subjects in the school, but even where she did have a colleague teaching the same subject, they rarely did much planning together. Part of the reason for this was that she felt less fluent in the language than her colleague; "I just had a complex about my Irish by comparison with hers". (Conor makes a similar observation, p. 94)

Later, she did describe one occasion when she was involved in team teaching with another teacher, an experience she did not enjoy (see p. 115).

Comment: It is clear that the type of "collegiality" to which Linda refers is important, but is it a collegiality based on personal friendships rather than "professional trust" (Hargreaves, 2002: 395), so does not permit discussion of many of the issues of greatest significance to teachers' professional lives.

Extra-curricular involvement

Throughout her career Linda organised many of extra-curricular activities – draughts, chess, debates, quizzes - which she very much enjoyed.

... going off in the bus with them and a bit of a sing song and a bit of craic ... it was great for them and you saw their joy ... when they won. ... And it gave the teacher the opportunity to see students in a different light; not as a student, but as an individual who had different interests, talents, even sense of humour that often weren't visible in the classroom.

She also believes that:

the bond that develops maybe through the extra-curricular has a spin-off in the classroom, definitely ... They see a different vision of you as a teacher in the classroom [where] you are the disciplinarian, you have to get [things] done.

Comment: So, extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for the self of the teacher to become visible, and to create different kinds of relationships with students than are possible in the classroom.

Relationships

It is clear from everything she says that Linda sees relationships as the “enabling” context within which teaching occurs; “if you don’t have a good relationship with the students, you are dead in the water”. Indeed, Linda sees teaching as taking place within a wider network of relationships.

... not just [teacher and student]. I felt I had responsibilities to so many sectors; the student himself fellow students, parents etc.

Of course, the primary relationships are within the classroom. Examples earlier of where she sits beside students to help them, and how she tries to treat them as she would her own children, indicate the type of relationship she tries to form with them. This is further demonstrated by her involvement in extra-curricular activities.

Two examples from the many she gave illustrate aspects of the relationships between her and her students. In the first, she talks about the few occasions where she would have had a stand-off with a student.

I would be very conscious maybe of the put down of the child. That would hurt me a lot and I would probably be the one who would have done the put down or he might have been putting me down too. But I mean I am the adult. I can cope with that. And often times these stand offs ... put the class in a very bad, invidious position really because naturally they'd have had to appear to support the student no matter [what] ... there have been a few occasions when I apologised to a student either privately or in front of a class if I felt I had overstepped the mark.

Comment: She is recognising here that the teacher is also exposed to being offended or upset by students, but should be able to cope with it. However, this calls for personal strength and maturity from the teacher, and is not always easy. Teachers can sometimes feel quite exposed and it is difficult not to respond out of the upset. This is also referred to by Ben (p. 70).

The second example illustrates the role of humour in the teaching relationship.

I have a good sense of humour, which often added to the fun atmosphere in the class and which I used regularly to ‘stir things up’ in the fun sense. For example, on a wet day, I’d ask one of the students to go over for, say, a tape recorder. I’d probably pick on the ‘hard man’ of the class; he’d say ‘it’s raining’, and I’d reply “a drop of rain won’t do you any harm – it might even make you grow up!” He’d say ‘ha ha’ with a grin on his face, and off he’d go, and the rest of the class would be laughing. But it was harmless fun and someone would surely come out with some witty retort to me or the ‘hard man’. Many occasions like that helped.

Comment: Humour of this kind is something that only works within a relationship, where there are common understandings, goodwill and boundaries. Reading this story without the context of relationship, it could be interpreted in different ways, for example as bullying or intimidation by the teacher, or abusing power, and putting down the student. Yet in the context of Linda's teaching, this is clearly not what was intended or what happened. It took place within the relationship between her and her class, and humour is an important part of that. It is also an example of where the teacher acknowledges and affirms the peer group and thereby encourages respectful humour and acknowledgement among its members.

Summary

Linda is looking back on a career spanning over thirty years. It is clear from her interpretation of her role as a teacher that she set high standards in terms of the level of care which she tried to provide for her students. Using the love of her own children as the basis on which to model the care she sought to provide demanded a selfless, almost open-ended personal as well as professional commitment to her teaching which she willingly gave. However, attempting to meet such a deep and wide range of students' needs is so nearly impossible that it risks leaving the teacher feeling incompetent, demoralised and with feelings of failure. In our conversations Linda makes frequent references to such feelings. She also struggled throughout her career to balance her personal values with those of the institution, a struggle which persisted unresolved throughout her career.

CONOR

Initially Conor had thought of studying medicine, but was advised against it, and since both his parents were teachers, it was hardly surprising that teaching was his next choice. He was very involved in sport, and the long holidays in teaching were attractive from that point of view. But, he adds:

Certainly that wouldn't have been my main motivation. The main motivation would have been that I was immersed ... in teaching since I was a child ... I always knew it was a rewarding career ... because both of my parents were very happy in the job ... [and were] completely absorbed in it.

In addition, he says he liked people, and “there was something about being able to influence the course of a person's life I suppose really” which was also part of his motivation to teach.

He found the first few years “difficult enough, really”. The H. Dip. was of little value in preparing for “the organisation and rigours of the classroom”. So early on, “you had to learn classroom management, classroom craft; you had to learn that there was such a thing as a syllabus ... all by yourself”. So, he says his early teaching career was “one of learning”. He adds:

I possibly wasn't the greatest teacher in the world during that early period of time. There was a lot of trial and error. Discipline never was a major problem but if I had a particularly difficult disciplinary situation, I probably dealt with it in the early period ... with an aggressive kind of a bossy teachery [sic] approach.

Using this “aggressively teacherish attitude” is one of the regrets of his teaching career.

After about four years teaching, he saw another teacher in the school using a different approach to students and discipline, and he says he “learned a lot from that and consequently never really used the kind of heavy handed approach after that”. He realised that if a child had a problem, he or she “didn't need more aggression from me, that's for sure”.

Personal growth and maturity also played a part in his maturing approach to his job. He says “you certainly do get more mellow and you learn about people and you learn about yourself as well”. Having his own children was also a big influence.

It brings it to mind that, being a teacher, other people hand you over children the way I hand over my children to other teachers. So you become much more

sharply aware that 'listen, these kids in front of me could be my kids' ... the whole thing is clarified much more for you when you have your own kids.

Comment: Like Linda and Ben, Conor's formal education as a teacher was of little help in his early years, and he had to learn how to teach by himself. Like Cathy and Ben, he found himself being aggressive and bossy with children but, through his own personal growth and maturity and seeing another teacher demonstrate a different approach, his teaching became more empathetic.

His view of education

He describes his values as a teacher as follows:

To give an honest days' work for an honest day's pay; that I would be as friendly and humane to my students as I can be; that I'd leave them a bit better off than without me, whatever that is I don't know. Overall that I'd do as well as I could.

Comment: This use of the word 'humane' suggests the possibility of the teacher becoming inhumane as a risk of the job. Underpinning this is an acknowledgement that teaching takes place within relationships, that teachers have considerable power. It also recognises that teachers' personalities are vulnerable to distortion in the job.

When describing what gave him most fulfilment in second-level teaching, Conor says:

I suppose the actual pure joy out of seeing the realisation in a student's face that they now understand something that they didn't. Seeing the student gradually gain more interest in the subject, becoming more involved ... Where they were interested in what I was teaching them, partly because of the way I did it maybe, that gave me satisfaction. It always gave me satisfaction of course ... that I could meet always a student on the street after they left and chat and talk to them as, almost as not teacher and student kind of relationship, that gave me satisfaction.

Conor says he has mixed feelings about the role of examinations in education.

They're certainly a great motivator. They're certainly a very fair way of sorting ... people, maybe in a harsh manner ... I don't know is there any fairer way of allowing people their choice. In other words the people with the greatest academic ability get the first choice. Maybe that's harsh; I don't know a fairer way of doing it.

He does acknowledge that social background can also affect a students' performance in school.

I do certainly acknowledge it's there and I do acknowledge that the exam, the points system and the exam system isn't fair to everybody. But from what I can see, I can't see a fairer way at the moment ... I don't know how to build in a corrective factor into it.

He also believes that examinations provide a framework within which to teach. He says “they provide a pathway ... and a structured one at that”. And he believes:

only the better teachers or the very good teachers would be best used in a situation where you didn't have to follow a syllabus or adhere to an exam system. It's a necessary evil. I don't see a solution to it myself.

This observation resonates with Ben's comments about teachers not being willing to teach religion as a non-exam subject (p. 65).

Comment: Conor's observations about examinations are ambivalent. He says they are fair, yet acknowledges they are unfair to some; and he is prepared to live with that. He also sees them as making life easier for teachers, though he does say that “you're kind of hide-bound time wise to a syllabus”.

Teaching adults

Mid-way through his career, Conor moved more into the Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) area which meant he was now mainly teaching adults. In our discussions, I was interested in his reflections now on his time teaching at second-level, and how the job differs between second-level and teaching adults. One difference he identifies is that it is easier to establish relationships with the Post-Leaving Certificate class, partly because he finds them generally more motivated.

Once you establish a relationship [with an adult student], that's the end of that almost ... certainly it's more difficult to achieve that with the younger person who may not be motivated.

He describes motivation of students as bringing them to the point where they are ready and want to learn.

... the job of trying to motivate them ... to enjoy the subject was more difficult [at second-level]. It may eventually happen ... [that] they get involved in it and ... in the routine of the class and the achievement, unknown to themselves ... [it was] one of the more difficult things we had to do at second-level ... in every class you'd have two, three, four, five, six, depending on the class, that you were trying to tease on all the time and some you didn't succeed with.

Now, I have to say this that with some, especially maths that I was teaching, some didn't have the intellectual capacity to understand what I was doing. And

it must have been hell for them. And I really feel for them but, that's life I'm afraid.

Comment: This comment may reflect the fact that Conor sees his job as an academic one. This contrasts with a comment Ben made: “Because teachers tend to be middle class, and tend to be good at the academic themselves, they are often not able to connect with less able students”

Conor believes that adults look for professionalism in a teacher more than second-level students do. Adults have met professionals such as doctors or solicitors and see the way they work. And he feels they are more comfortable and confident if they detect a sense of professionalism, “of knowing what you are about”, from the teacher. He identifies the elements of professionalism as:

a sense that they're in capable hands; that there's a method; that there's a control, a demeanour, dress even. And awareness that there's a respect of the person, for their privacy ... they don't step over the mark with people ... there's also an awareness ... of personal boundaries and indeed social boundaries.

He summarises professionalism as a “mixture of being in control of your brief and being friendly at the same time but being aware that there are boundaries also.

His personal involvement with his students is important for Conor. “You know about them and you know ... what is going on to a certain extent without being intrusive into their backgrounds.” He says that he tried to find ways of bringing students “out of themselves” and helping them to grow in confidence, as well as teaching them a particular subject. He recalled two examples:

There's a man I met last night and he had two or three kids with us [in the past] and they were big into dogs and one of them ... I had was a very shy kind of a young lad. But I used to often engage him in class on the subject of dogs and betting and 5/4 and 3/1 as well as maths and that sort of thing. I would probably say that he gained the respect of the class, that he was an expert in that area and ... he often would have bet a lot of money. At the time maybe it could be £20 or something like that. It would have given him a status [with his peers] ...

I used to often have a joke with the lads from [name of townland] about the bog and all that and they took it in good spirit. Again, it took them out of a sense of anonymity ... they weren't anonymous any more.

Comment: These examples show a teacher intervening in the peer group dynamic in a positive way on behalf of a student, and of how a teacher must be conscious of, and in a sense, manage relationships between students, whether in a pro-active way as in these cases, or a preventative way as, for example, in cases of bullying. And, in

making such interventions, Conor acknowledges that he is taking a risk, both personally and on behalf of the student: “you could try ways of bringing them out [of themselves] and they might not work and they might not be well accepted. You could be wrong at times, [but] you try something else.” But it is obviously a risk Conor believes to be an important part of the teacher’s job. As in the case of Linda (p. 87), his use of humour here is possible only because of, and within the context of, his relationship with the class and the individual students concerned.

The nature of second-level teaching

Conor feels that adults are more open; they are “probably more confident of their ability to stand up and tell you ‘look. I want to be treated in a certain way’”. This may also be because they are less susceptible to peer pressure. He says that it is a “harder job teaching second-level than adults, less rewarding in many ways and harder”. He adds:

There’s a background energy required to keep discipline with 20 or 30 young people; there’s a background energy that you have to pump out there to keep their attention even, which isn’t required with adults. And that background energy can actually drain you ... it’s quite tiring, stressful.

Comment: Conor says that this ‘background energy’ relates to the process of establishing and sustaining relationships. This must be done with adults also, but is more stressful with teenagers because of the peer group, and also because of the pressure of motivating them.

Conor feels that what motivates many teachers to enter the profession is that

A lot of us teachers are semi-academics who like the actual learning process. Now with the adults and changing modules you’re learning all the time. It’s part of your job to learn all the time. It’s a challenge. There’s a bit of an academic in a lot of us, and there’s a bit of an academic challenge for us too ...

However, he feels that “there’s a lack of that in second-level”.

After four or five years you know the curriculum upside down, it becomes a bit repetitious ... You’re not learning, you’re not researching, you’re not using your brain, maybe, as much. And I’ve seen many, many people going very stale and one-tracked.

Conor returned to the topics of ownership of the work and of intellectual challenge when we discussed what makes second-level teachers unhappy in the job, “who are driven cranky by it”. Reasons for this would include:

Lack of intellectual involvement, I would say, would be a big one. In other people, a lack of ownership of what they are doing, that they feel they are ... firing out stuff given to them and being assessed by somebody else; not being able to have any input into the curriculum, not being able to have any input into assessment or stuff like that. I suppose some people are really not able for the relationships involved with students and consequently their day is hassle totally, and that's not a nice place to be ... it must be hell.

For many teachers, their ideals and motives take a battering ... Constant defeat is an eroding experience. I would say that to be a teacher that is kind of happy you have to have a personality that is reasonably good with people.

Comment: For Conor, it is the academic challenge which is motivating, rather the interpersonal one, and he does not see second-level teaching as an academic challenge. He does not see the relationship side of the job as a learning challenge; he regards an ability to get on with people and to teach as something inherent in a person's personality, not a skill to be learned. "I think the die is cast before you go into the job".

Throughout his career, he has never seen another teacher teaching.

I don't believe I did [in a tone of surprise] except being taught myself. I don't believe I ever sat in a class and observed another teacher teaching. No. ... It's a kind of a private thing to some extent. Not many would like another teacher in the classroom with them.

He elaborated a little more in a later conversation:

Teachers ... have a big fear of discussing their actual subject because they have a big fear of not knowing as much as the other person of their subject. ... Another no-go area would be having another teacher see you teaching in class – I mean I must say myself I'd be a little bit reluctant.

Referring to the fact that he learned a new approach to discipline from observing a teacher in action, he observed:

If I picked up something from him in ten minutes that lasted me a lifetime, one would think [that we would pick up things from each other]. I mean ... apprenticeships are all about observing somebody else doing a job, yet we don't have it

Comment: Conor acknowledges that teachers in his school could probably have learned from each other, and sees it quite reasonable that this should happen, but it was not part of the culture in which he worked for his whole career.

Conor reflects, in this conversation, on significant issues relating to teaching which he had not reflected on previously, and the possibility for development of thinking and, maybe, practice from that is evident in his comments.

Effects of teaching on personality

In my own school, we moved from second-level to further education where we were mainly teaching adults. In the process, I felt some staff (including myself) experienced a sense almost of liberation; it was as if a weight had been removed from our shoulders; a tightness removed from our relationships. So, I asked Conor, whose school had followed a somewhat similar path, if he had experienced anything similar. He said he had, that the move resulted in “more ownership over your job” because at second-level,

... the Leaving Cert. was a set course and a set curriculum and we didn't have any ownership over setting exams or setting projects or correcting exams. It's a systemic thing.

He went on to say that he believed that a teacher's personality changes when they are dealing with second-level students.

You're more formal, you're more rigid, you're more guarded, and that actually does spill out into your behaviour socially after school. And I often used to remark that it used to take me nearly two months of the summer holidays to shake that off ... even when you are down town if you met students you wouldn't be as – you're acting the role of “the teacher”, and that does get into you ... [you're] keeping a level of aloofness because you won't want them to be coming in calling you “how are you Connie, did you have a few pints last night” or something like that, whereas with adults you actually wouldn't mind that, so your whole guard isn't up, you're not as rigid ... It often used to annoy me to feel halfway through the summer holidays that I was becoming a different person, and then gradually once September came you got back into ... a little bit of a teacher mode.

In this extract, Conor describes a significant aspect of what it was like to be a second-level teacher. That teaching affects the teacher's personality and life outside as well as inside school. (This is analysed in more detail p. 132)

Summary

Conor was idealistic entering teaching; he felt he could influence people's lives for the better. His early years in the job were difficult enough; he learned the job by trial and error, using a heavy-handed approach to disciplinary issues. However, he moved

from this over a few years to a more empathetic approach, helped by his own development as a person (and the birth of his own children) and by seeing a colleague using a different approach. Working now in adult education, he reflects back that second-level teaching is more difficult, requiring a “background energy” which the teacher must “pump out” to keep their attention. He sees relationships as central to teaching, but again more difficult to manage at second-level where the teacher must also motivate and discipline students. He gives examples of how being a teacher at second-level affected his personal and social life outside of school as well as in the classroom. And he identified an absence of intellectual challenge in second-level. Reflecting back over his career, he says he has never seen another teacher teaching in a classroom.

ROBERT

Robert has recently retired from teaching having been a teacher of practical subjects throughout his career. As an apprentice, his 'time' almost completed, an older colleague suggested and encouraged him to apply for teacher training. He had seen another apprentice take this route a few years earlier, and he had always enjoyed practical classes in school. Indeed one of his practical teachers was an inspiration to him at that time because "his classes were always enjoyable ... and the work that was done in the class by everybody ... was exceptional", and also because the teacher's own work was of a standard that enhanced his credibility. His two years of training as a teacher were very practical. As part of the training, they regularly sat in with teachers in a nearby school, and then would be "given work to do for the next class to prepare for it". So, when he began his first job, "the ice was well broken for us because we had dealt with students, we had dealt with classes".

Discipline was not a problem. "I didn't find any difficulties ... I wasn't aware of an awful lot of discipline problems ... going mitching¹³ was probably a bigger problem". Indeed, Robert is the only participant who did not have difficulties in his early years teaching. He puts this down to the practical nature of the "training" he got as a student teacher.

Games

Robert was involved in school games from the beginning, an involvement he maintained throughout his career. Relationships established on the football field carried over into the classroom also.

I found it an advantage because you got to meet pupils outside of the classroom situation on the field and ... you built up a fair relationship with them because if you were training a team and if you were taking a team to matches and so on, there was a good camaraderie built up ... And some of that ... spilled into the classroom as well.

Robert's involvement in games arose in the first place from his own interest, and he saw games as "being a big [part of the] development of students in the school". This was particularly true for those who were academically less able.

¹³ Playing truant

And [for] some of these fellows, a games day on a Thursday or Friday, or going to a match or representing the school, it gave them a sort of a pride in themselves and it made them feel ... good about themselves. And some of these lads, at times they found school very difficult ... because they felt they weren't achieving an awful lot in the classroom itself. And their achievements, and the respect they got from their peers were on the field; and for that reason a lot of these lads in later life, while they didn't remember a lot of the classroom, they remembered the games. [And] in later life when they came to depending on other people and trust and honesty, that's the core that was built up with your comrades on the field ... irrespective of what level.

Comment: This statement gives us an insight into Robert's values as a teacher, and shows that these related to more than the academic. For him teaching was about developing the person. Respect is a word he uses in many contexts. Extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for him to achieve this in ways that are not possible in the classroom. His involvement in games can also be seen as a means of intervening in the dynamics of the peer group in order to allow students to gain the respect of their peers; something Conor (p. 92) and Linda (p. 87) also tried to do.

Though Robert put in a lot of effort, "the effort that a lot of the students would put in would far surpass the effort that I was putting in", and that kept him going. Indeed, he identified some achievements in games as highlights of his career.

Any success that the school would have had on the field of play would have meant a fierce lot to me ... And I suppose ... some of the students who represented the county ... the day that four of the school students actually pulled on the county jersey in Croke Park in the final, that would have been a fierce proud day.

Comment: Robert's involvement with his students in games demonstrates that he was intrinsically motivated. It arose from his own interest in the games, and he is nourished by the response he receives from his students within the "caring relationship" formed by this involvement (Noddings, 1992). One must question whether extrinsic motivation could ever reproduce such commitment.

Robert's view of teaching

The nature of his subject dictated that safety was an important consideration for Robert. And discipline was very important for him. "I would find lack of discipline intolerable in ... the (practical) room where I was teaching because of the danger involved".

It was my job to make sure everybody felt at ease and safe inside ... Considering at any time you could have had maybe five, six machines going and 24 pupils in the classroom, I mean there had to be a certain amount of trust built up between you and the students in the classroom. So, from that point of view you had to have a fairly sound ... relationship with the actual students in the class itself ... they had to trust you and you also had to trust them.

Getting students to take pride in their work was central to Robert's philosophy of teaching. He believed pride in his or her work would lead a student to self-respect. Sometimes he would see a student struggling or frustrated in trying to make a woodwork piece in class,

and you'd say to yourself, 'here I'll give you a hand with that.' You know, just, it's maybe a little bit of a push that he needed and you give a person more time just to get it and basically respect will be something he could take home ... You know it always came back to that the whole time; that you weren't going to let rubbish go out the door. But at the same time you wanted the youngster to put in as much of an effort as he possibly could himself.

Comment: The emphasis in these statements by Robert on work and safety, on trust as a key element of safety, and on pride in his work suggest that Robert's view of teaching owes a lot to an apprenticeship model; a model grounded in teaching the young person self-respect through respect for his or her work. His spending time with the young person was to help his or her learning through increasing his or her self-respect.

This was a lesson Robert learned as a young apprentice. Having done a job that was not good enough, he was rebuked by his boss; "we take pride in what we do in here and anything going out that door is going to be done properly ... And I think that stuck with me ...". He now believes that, as a teacher, "you have to have a grá¹⁴ for the subject and if you haven't, I don't know how you could teach it. I couldn't."

Discipline

It was only in the latter years of his teaching career that discipline became an issue.

... problems didn't manifest themselves until possibly I suppose maybe the last eight years where the attitude of students started to change. And they weren't as compliant, they didn't appreciate the actual danger ... they were more given towards back answer. Your word was no longer law.

¹⁴ Love

He admits to not being “a very placid individual”, but he says “I don't think my patience was any worse than it ever was”, and he found this new situation extremely difficult. And it occurred despite the fact that “we had a structure in place at that stage”.

[We had] every imaginable type of deterrent in so far as the discipline structure within the school and so far as monitoring sheets, report sheets in so far as diaries, punishments, detentions. And a lot of these things were not in place for the first 25 years of my teaching career. And when I think of - we had nearly 500 pupils and we had one person looking after discipline and it just shows how much it has changed that you have five year heads looking after discipline and finding it tough going.

He finds it difficult to explain the change that took place, but suggests many reasons relating to social changes. He also attributes part of the difficulty to the fact that the school had a declining enrolment.

We were getting students into the school that were less well endowed and as a result, instead of being in the minority [where they] would sort of go with the flow and behave themselves, now they became the majority; and as a result the teaching of these lads was an awful lot harder.

Discipline procedures came to generate a lot of paperwork. It became “almost like a court case”, and “the same as courts in the country, there was too much paperwork before action takes place.” However, he does understand the need for this paperwork.

It's a fierce annoyance but at the end of the day you have boards of management ... and you have to produce the paperwork for these. And both sides have to be protected and ... accusations can be made at times on both sides, and from a teaching point of view you can be very, very vulnerable inside in a classroom. You are there and it's 25 or 24 against one. You have to be sure yourself.

Comment: This last comment betrays a fear of things getting out of hand, of teachers being victimised, (see Cathy's comment re girl, p. 80), and he did elsewhere cite an example of a teacher being wrongly accused.

Yet, while acknowledging the need for paperwork, he sees the system as “cumbersome”, and he feels that discipline has slipped because of the amount of it. He is not even sure if it is possible for such a system to work because of the time it requires; “it would be nearly a full-time [job] to cover the whole area ... you could lose a day [or] half a day with even one problem”.

Comment: Robert's sense that the system is unworkable, that discipline has slipped despite (or because of) the bureaucracy is significant. It suggests that schools are being asked to adopt disciplinary processes and procedures that are unworkable, or which are not in congruence with teachers' values.

Robert found that there were some of his fellow staff members that he could "trust without any doubt" in the sense that if he got a complaint from one of them, he would know the student must be "really stepping out of line", but with others he would be less sure.

Experience would tell you where it will end ... In some cases what you would do before you'd move these fellows on [is that] you would take a fellow to one side and have a chat with him. Then in some cases it would be sufficient ... but, you know, you have to read the signals ...

He acknowledges that there were times when he had to deal with cases where he felt the teacher was wrong, maybe had acted "unfairly, or with a bit of vindictiveness towards his student". Dealing with such cases, he said, was one of the most difficult parts of his job.

Comment: I detected that in such circumstances he found himself acting without conviction, trying to deal with the matter by having a chat with the student while at the same time placating the teacher.

In some situations, he would know of a teacher having difficulties, for instance "where you would hear disruption being carried out and totally against what we would have agreed in a school".

[Sometimes] you could approach the person afterwards with a view to try and be helpful only to be told, no that's not necessary ... it wasn't your role. And you would be doing this as discretely as possible without ever trying to humiliate a person or make a person feel that they were wrong.

So, even when you could see "things going wrong and know where the problem is", it was difficult for a "year head, a vice-principal or a principal" to do anything about it.

Comment: My sense is that Robert feels that the focus has moved from addressing the immediate disciplinary issue in the context of relationship to a quasi-legal procedure, and that this begins very early in the process. He acknowledges the need for such an emphasis, in order to deal with the cases of the few who eventually go as far as the Board of Management, but he seems slightly uncomfortable with it. Maybe his values of trust, relationship, and fairness are not being given high enough priority

in the process. Can teachers develop new discipline procedures which incorporate their values?

In a later conversation, he illustrates this with an example which occurred during school exam time.

So, just the commencement of an after-dinner session and I just went over to check that everything was alright, to check on latecomers, and straight opposite me was a girl who was sitting in the same seat which she had sat in the whole week and she had caused absolutely no hassle to anybody whatsoever. And the particular teacher came into the room and he looked around and he says 'you; up to the front' he says. And she says 'why, I've been sitting here the whole week'. 'I'm telling you, up to the front' so she says 'no other teacher has a problem with me sitting here' so, straight away, 'out' ... but I didn't want to interfere because there was a full class there and it would cause embarrassment to both parties. The next thing I realised there had been further words outside the door and the next thing the student was landed in the principal's office. Now, as it transpired, the teacher had an ongoing difference with this particular student and I felt it was so upsetting for her because she had caused no hassle during the course of the exams and to me it was unfair – there was plenty of other people who had caused minor disturbances during the exams. And I felt it was wrong of the principal to even deal with it – it was something that needn't have gone that far.

... Now, I would feel that it was unfair treatment [and] of course you would have to feel personally upset, because in a sense of fair play ... [you'd remember from your own schooldays] some of the treatment meted out ... was so very, very unfair. I suppose you say to yourself [when you start teaching], well, if possible you won't be part of something that would be the same.

He felt that this incident was caused by a clash of personalities. "There was at the time assistance given to students if they were finding a subject difficult and this student went and got help in the subject from another teacher and got on the finest", and he feels that this was in some way responsible for the first teacher's attitude; that he may have felt slighted, or his pride was hurt. He did not approach the teacher about the incident. "You don't want to make enemies for yourself if you can avoid it. Then you knew you weren't going to make much ground, after it going to the principal's office".

Comment: This story shows how Robert was party to an incident where he was upset for the girl who was badly treated, and annoyed by his colleague's behaviour, when one of his fundamental professional values (fairness) was being publicly attacked and he felt powerless to act.

Of course the real reason why this incident occurred can only be conjecture at this point. But Robert's interpretation of it is worthy of scrutiny, informed as it is by his long experience as a teacher and year head. What is informative is that Robert's experience leads him to believe that the teacher may have felt slighted or hurt, and acted out of that hurt.

This incident shows that there was no means within the staff to deal with incidents like this. He believes that no colleague would have spoken to the teacher about this incident. It may have been an incident from which he learned a lesson, and grew as a teacher, but if this is the case, it was a personal discovery, unaided and unsupported by colleagues. This highlights an absence of professional collegiality.

Professional supports

Robert cites his colleagues in his subject area in the school as very supportive, and also a very active county-wide subject teachers' association. This association was organised by the teachers themselves, and provided "training that was actually needed to have a finger on the pulse ... the Department of Education didn't appreciate really what was needed on the ground".

When Robert was training, he was often in a classroom with another teacher teaching, but he has not seen a colleague teaching for many years (other than student teachers on work placement). He adds, however, that "you would certainly be aware of the effectiveness of other teachers teaching ... you'd know who was good and who was bad". This knowledge, however, comes from silent observation rather than open discussion of practice, and there is no mechanism to share good classroom practice, and no mechanism to provide support to weaker colleagues.

Robert believes that the Teaching Council has not made much of an impact. He has the handbook "it seemed to be just a list of names of various committees. Maybe, eventually, they will have a function within the education system".

In describing his view of professionalism, he emphasised:

You have to have a certain amount of love for your subject, and you take pride in it ... you're getting paid for it. There's an onus on you to do it properly. And if you are not doing it properly, you deserve a rap across the knuckles, and this is something within the teaching profession that a lot of people will shy away from.

Summary

Robert's motivation in teaching is very much based around the idea of respect and self-respect. In games, in the classroom and in his disciplinary role in the school, he tried to enable his students to experience pride in their achievements and respect for themselves. His involvement in games and the manner in which he organised his classes were designed to provide opportunities to experience such pride and respect. In this, he had to make personal judgements regarding the extent to which he would provide hands-on help for weaker students. His observations about his role in the discipline indicate a system which appears necessary for legal reasons but which is not very efficient or effective on the ground, and which does not accord very closely with his values.

DAN

Introduction

In this section, I present my own story, taken largely from when I was interviewed as part of this study, and from conversations with participants. I include it primarily because I believe, as Harding (1987:9) states, that “the beliefs and behaviours of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of the research. This evidence too must be open to scrutiny”. I have presented my account of my career in the third person to enable inclusion of quotations from conversations, to maintain consistency and comparability with the accounts of other participants, and because it may be easier to describe dispassionately personal instances in my career.

Motivation and early years

Dan had never liked school, and found the years coming up to the Intermediate Certificate¹⁵ to be lonely and difficult in many ways. Things began to improve after that, and it was in fifth year that he began to think about teaching. He was idealistic and wanted to do something worthwhile with his life, and had also considered the priesthood. He says: “I thought about this for a long time, that I could do just as much good by being a teacher (as being a priest) and still maybe have a family”. He remembers a school friend suggesting after the Leaving Certificate that he should go on to be a doctor, and he replying that he could not see anything more important than helping young people to grow. He says “I certainly saw teaching as a vocation ... I certainly didn’t do it for the holidays [or] the money.” He added:

As a young fella I didn't have that many friends and I couldn't play football; I didn't fit in very well in a lot of ways. I felt an outsider a lot and I think I wanted to help other students avoid that ... certainly through college I think that was a big part of my motivation. It certainly wasn't to teach them physics or maths.

It was about fifth year also that a new, young lay teacher arrived in the school who had a different approach than any teacher he had had before, and this gave him a vision of teaching that he could relate to.

¹⁵ Age fifteen

Throughout college, he worked hard for his degree in science. Then, for the first time in his life, he did not study hard for the Higher Diploma in Education; he did not find it particularly interesting, but mostly he did not feel that there was anything to learn about teaching. He had been through school himself and had clear ideas of what kind of a teacher he would like to be.

He remembers the shock of his first year teaching in a suburban secondary school. It was not like what he expected. Students were not interested in discussing things as he had expected. Controlling classes was also difficult – it was not something he had wanted to do. He went into the job to work *with* students, not to have to *control* them. The first year was very difficult and disillusioning and it seriously affected his self-esteem. He recalls many incidents from that year, including the following:

There was one sixth year class that I was asked to supervise as the teacher was absent. So, I sat at the front of the class and let them do their study or homework. Shortly into the class, somebody began humming. I did not know who it was and didn't think it worth making a big scene about. Next somebody else joined him, and soon the whole class was humming lowly. I did not know how to stop it and it lasted for most of the class. Later word of it went around the staffroom and it was very humiliating.

At that time the only way he knew to tackle it would have been head-on; he would deal with such a situation now with a bit of humour. He adds that no colleague spoke of it to him or offered advice or help.

He did have satisfaction in some classrooms during his first year teaching, but involvement with students outside the classroom also helped him survive. In the second year he discovered how to plan and pace lessons, and gained a lot in confidence. To this day, if asked for advice by a young person entering teaching, he says “give it two years”.

Development as a teacher

He loved his years in the school, but there were aspects of the school ethos and of the practise of his colleagues with which he was not comfortable. He felt that weaker students were not valued or treated as well as they should be. A common attitude among staff was that they should go to the local vocational school. Corporal punishment was used in the school, and there were a number of incidents where teachers' actions left him feeling uncomfortable. He rarely used corporal punishment himself, but came to realise that the occasions when he did use it reflected more his own state of mind than the incident in question. Thus, while he really liked the

school, his colleagues and the students, he found that certain things persisted which he always felt were not right. In general, he felt that students deserved more respect and that the parents' role was not respected.

As the most junior member of the staff, he found some of this ethos rubbing off in his own practice. For example, he largely accepted that weak or difficult students should simply leave the school; he often wondered how any teacher would stay in a vocational school with such students. It was only when he moved to a community school and mixed with colleagues drawn from both the secondary and vocational sectors that he realised that there were ways of teaching and approaches to students which could be inclusive of all students, not just the more able; and that, indeed, many from the vocational sector were far better teachers than he was. This school opened a new world of education to him. It was a new school, so everything was being planned, and principles of education were being discussed. Corporal punishment was not used, which he greatly welcomed; in its place, agreed discipline structures were drawn up, based on fairness, respect and responsiveness to needs. New ideas and approaches were tried and welcomed, and he took on the role of class tutor which involved him in pastoral care for his students and in discipline. He later became year head, a position which gave him marvellous opportunity to develop as an educator, and he really enjoyed the depth and range of engagement with students which this position afforded.

He recalls one small incident which had a major impact on his career. After conducting an assembly with his year group, a colleague remarked to him that he had "a good way of communicating with students".

Just that sentence meant more to me I think than anything that anybody has ever said to me in my whole teaching career. Because I believed him, because I knew it was true ... but I hadn't realised it before that. It gave me the courage to try many new approaches with students.

It was his experience as year head that encouraged him to apply for the position of principal in a small school; a position that he felt would be similar to being year head in a bigger one.

He clearly recalls one day after about fifteen years teaching, chatting with his CEO about their motivations for teaching. He remembers recalling the ideals that had first brought him into the job and realising that this was something he had never discussed since he began in the job; and he remembers how good it felt to recall his idealism. He feels that in his early years teaching his ideals were partly submerged by

the imperative of survival. The atmosphere in his second school, and particularly when he became year head and had to resolve discipline and other issues, reconnected him with his values and ideals. But it was later still when he articulated them.

Extra-curricular activities

Throughout his career, he was involved very much with students outside the classroom, committing a lot of time and effort to extra-curricular activities. Looking back now, he says:

I think my motivation for starting teaching was to help young people to sort of grow up and get through what I had experienced as difficult years and I think I found it wasn't possible to do that [adequately] in the classroom ...

He organised hostel trips and games, a social work group and a youth club. Here he also found that he could provide experiences for growth and development for his students that were not possible within the classroom. He also found relationships established with students in such activities rewarding, and found that this helped in the classroom also.

Staffroom culture

In the staffroom, he always made very conscious efforts to intervene when teachers were complaining about students, putting forward the student's side to the story, or suggesting some action that might be taken (by the teacher or himself) to resolve the issue (as distinct from applying a sanction). Over the years he believes that he did succeed in softening attitudes in the staffroom somewhat.

He always saw staff meetings as opportunities for staff development and encouraged openness in discussion, and feels he was quite successful in this regard, and that teachers did develop more balanced attitudes to students, and a greater sense of common purpose as a staff. However, he says that when he left the principalship and reflected, he realised that "I could influence everything that happened in the school except what happened in the classroom". In particular, he felt he was unable to influence how teachers taught. While he was very happy with the way most teachers operated in class, he felt unable to influence the few.

Dealing with discipline issues & compromises

As year head and then principal, he found himself dealing with discipline issues. He characterises a discipline issue as a situation where a teacher has a difficulty with a student, or *vice-versa*, which needs to be resolved. He saw his role as trying to resolve such issues in a win-win manner. He never saw his role as one of simply implementing sanctions.

I would always talk to both teacher and student and try to get each of them to see the other's point of view so that they could begin working together again, hopefully on a more successful footing than before; it was my job to try to bring this about.

Trying to find resolution was often difficult, but he enjoyed trying, and he found great satisfaction when he could do so. However, he found it stressful when either teacher or student appeared to be unreasonable. In fact, one of the reasons why he left the principalship after twelve years was what he considered as the regular compromises he had to make, and these were mostly where he felt a teacher was acting unreasonably, or a student being unfairly treated, and he felt powerless to do anything about it. He came to see the system as cruel to some students. He says:

One of the things I found myself doing both as year head and as principal ... was protecting kids from the cruelties of the system as I saw it ... and that's a difficult thing to do; you can't protect kids from the cruelties of the system the whole time.

He talks of other compromises also, for example in the context of public relations. As a head of a vocational school in a town with secondary schools, he had to struggle against the image of vocational schools as being for weak or less ambitious students. This was necessary to give pride to students in the school, and for their self-esteem. But doing so meant emphasising successes, for example good exam results, successes in extra-curricular events. This, he felt, compromised his general belief that education was not a competitive activity, and that real education was for personal and social growth rather than measurable achievement. He found this difficult.

He gave an example of where he felt compromised:

I remember a father and mother calling to the school to enrol their son. I could see that the son was weak academically and socially, and the parents had little formal education. I could also see the love they had for their son and the high hopes they held for him – that he would achieve maybe a lot more than they had. And they hoped education would do this for them. Effectively, they were handing their son over to me with all their love and their hopes, and they

believed that I would be able to realise their ambitions. And I knew in my heart that I would probably not be able to do so. And I remember a sadness and a sense of guilt and inadequacy.

His early years as principal were very exciting and rewarding, but the compromises gradually wore him down; he felt he was losing the energy and the influence to continue to improve practice. After twelve years as principal, he took a secondment from the job, which lasted for six years.

Encountering action research

His new position involved working with Youthreach and VTOS, and with the Mol an Óige project, an EU funded project aimed at exploring ways in which students at risk of failure in schools could be helped to succeed. He also encountered the ideas of action research, and began study for his Master of Education degree through action research. He found action research to be very liberating; he wrote in his dissertation:

It also encouraged me to articulate my own professional values and to assess my practice in the context of these values; it provided me with a methodology to improve my practice; and it provided me with the hope and courage that I could develop my practice in congruence with my values. This was a very important discovery, because the fear that certain frustrations were with me for the rest of my career was very stressful and disempowering. (Condren, 1998: 8)

Since his return as principal, he says his motivation also changed “from a desire to do good to a reliance and confidence in my personal and professional values, and a desire to see them implemented in my practice”. This more clearly brings congruence between means and ends.

Summary

Dan’s career has brought much joy, and also much struggle; but it is not a very coherent or consistent story. There were times when he showed considerable courage; others when he compromised on his principles. On two occasions he felt he had to leave the position he was in because his values were being compromised in his practice; once he moved school, once he left teaching. These moves “saved my career”. He feels that a particular challenge for the education system is to provide opportunities for teachers to nourish their careers at appropriate intervals; and that the staffroom should be a site of nourishment.

Summary of Chapter 4

The participants' accounts presents in this chapter throw a light on the nature of teaching highlighting aspects of the job not often considered. They show different motivations for teaching, different career journeys, and different sources of joy. But all accounts recall personal struggles between their values and their practice, the importance of relationships with students in their teaching, and an isolation and absence of professional nourishment in their staffrooms. Personal resilience shines through the accounts.

In Chapter 5, I analyse these issues in greater depth.

Chapter 5: A THEMATIC VIEW OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

In Chapter 4, I presented the individual accounts of the participants in the study and indicated, with comments, some themes emerging. In this chapter I discuss these and relate them to the literature. I group these under the headings: the nature of teaching, isolation and individualism, relationships, the selfhood of the teacher, struggles and resilience, towards a way forward. Finally, I summarise my findings, and locate them in the context of Irish educational discourse.

The nature of teaching

Technical and personal competences

My findings suggest that classroom teaching requires a set of technical and personal competences. Technically, there is a range of teaching methodologies and skills in classroom management and lesson preparation which can enable the teacher to be more effective in creating learning environments. Four of my participants attest to the fact that their own teacher education was deficient in this regard, and this caused them varying levels of difficulty, particularly in their earlier years. However, there is evidence that participants had different degrees of success in overcoming this 'technical deficit' as their careers developed. As for the personal competences, these are called into play in learning to understand students as individuals and as groups, in forming appropriate relationships, and in being able to cope with the 'personal buffeting' which is an inescapable aspect of teachers' work. My findings show that teaching is an emotional activity and is values driven, so teachers need to be personally and professionally aware and emotionally grounded. Teaching, then, is an activity which involves the teacher as a whole person.

There is a clear link also, as evidenced for example by Ben (p. 62) and Cathy (p. 75), between the technical and personal aspects of teaching, as competence in the technical aspects is essential to facilitate the achievement of the teacher's goals and the realisation of his or her values in practice.

Heightened awareness

van Manen (1995), Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1999), Christin (1996b), Palmer (2007), Rogers (2003) and Hargreaves (1999 and 2003) are among those who acknowledge that classroom teaching is a highly intense activity. Teachers work in a state of heightened awareness, constantly alert to what is happening in the room, watchful over and making myriad intuitive interventions in individual and group dynamics, individual and group relationships and individual and group learning. This is referred to in various ways by participants. Conor (p. 93) refers to the heightened alertness as “background energy” which the teacher has to employ in the process of teaching. Cathy talks about the exhaustion she experiences by the end of the week which she explains as follows:

If you sit down in a class they think they have a free class. So you're standing all day but you're also talking and you're not talking in your normal speaking voice; you're talking out loud really ... I find Friday evenings you're totally exhausted.

Ben's observations about “opportune moments” (p. 68) is another example of the state of heightened awareness within which teachers operate in the classroom. I believe that this is one of the things which creates stress in teaching, and is also a reason why the job affects teachers' personalities as well as their performance in the job.

Not an academic challenge

Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1999: 162) say that “the appeal of teaching is not in its intellectual rigour. It appeals to the heart – to those who like working with people rather than ideas”. Yet, this is not the common understanding of teaching, even among teachers; as Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1999) point out, the highest status is accorded to those who teach the oldest students – with university professors at the top of the status hierarchy. And the highest status among teachers is often accorded to the teacher of Leaving Certificate higher level subjects. This suggests that the basis for professionalism in teaching is linked to the complexity of the subject matter rather than to the pedagogy, the relationships involved or the overall potential influence on the lives of pupils. This notion of teaching as an intellectual or academic activity is, perhaps, supported by the fact that becoming a teacher requires, usually, four years to acquire an academic degree followed by only one year to obtain the

Higher Diploma in Education¹⁶, and is evidenced in confusion between expertise (or even a university degree) and professionalism (p. 117). But it does not accord with the experience of the participants in this study. For example, Conor (p. 77) says that the challenge is not an academic one, while Cathy (p. 75) describes the challenge as engaging students in the lesson, and Ben (p. 61) as trying to “love and respect” his students.

Valuing practicality

Teaching is a very practical occupation. Much as it is theorised about, the actual practice of teaching is busy, intense and immediate, and teachers value practicality; it is what works. This is understandable when one considers that what does not work can have serious consequences for teacher and students. van Manen (1995: 42) refers to teachers ability to act as coming from a “situated practical knowledge”. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) refer to teachers’ “personal practical knowledge”. Hargreaves (1994: 12) refers to an “influential sense of practicality among teachers (arising from) complex and potent combinations of purpose, person, politics and workplace constraints”. My own work in the Mol an Óige project also found that teachers were willing to attempt changes in their practice, but only after they could satisfy themselves that the changes “could work”. This focus on practicality may be encouraged by the vulnerability and exposure of teachers if things go wrong. But it is also driven by a concern about using their students as ‘guinea-pigs’ in testing new ideas.

The corollary of practicality is what Gleeson (2004: 106) refers to as an “inattention to intellectual analysis” surrounding Irish second-level education.

Privatism and Isolation

Privatism

One of the most stark findings of this research is that teachers generally see teaching as, in Conor’s words, “a kind of a private thing” (p. 94). This is evident in various ways in the experiences of all participants. Despite the fact that all participants had

¹⁶ A minority of second-level teachers follow an integrated model where education is part of their study over the four years of their degree course. This applies mainly for teachers of practical subjects, physical education, religion and, to a small extent, science.

many years teaching, Robert, Cathy and Conor had never seen another teacher teach, “except”, as Conor’s said, “being taught myself”; and in Robert’s case when he was training to be a teacher. Nor had another teacher ever seen any of them teach; that would be a “no-go” area according to Conor. Linda did for a time do team teaching with another teacher, as part of a project in which her school became involved, but it was not a very positive experience. “We were nearly like two separate entities in the class”. Her colleague did the teaching and worked with the brighter students, and Linda worked with the weaker ones. Though she tried to be tactful, “I think it wasn’t a good idea from the pupils’ point of view because you were highlighting the weaker ones, you know, and they knew that.” Though she and her colleague did not “know how to go about it”, she gives no indication that they spent time together evaluating why this was so and exploring how it might be made to work better, and there is a sense in what she says that she was relieved when it ended. It is clear that Linda was uncomfortable in another teacher’s classroom, and tried to make herself unobtrusive, and there is a strong sense of an invasion of privacy in her experience. Ben’s experience was quite different, and he had shared teaching with others in many situations.

I came across one other example of privatism when tutoring a group of teachers in the second year of their Master of Education degree. A significant number of them had not even mentioned in their staffrooms that they were engaged on the course, and a large majority had not discussed what they were doing with any their colleagues. It has been noted also in the recent TALIS report (OECD, 2009: 2) which states that the “relative use of professional collaboration in Ireland is low compared to teachers in other countries”.

This sense of privatism about their teaching underpins and structures the experience of teachers, and has far-reaching consequences for the work as they experience it and also for the forms of professional nourishment which they can receive.

Early experiences

Even before teachers enter teaching, there may be a predisposition towards privatism. Moen (2006) suggests that having been students for many years themselves student teachers assume that they know a lot about teaching. Many feel that they only need to learn *what* to teach rather than *how* to teach. She adds:

It is difficult for prospective teachers to consider alternative visions and ways of teaching. Student teachers do not stop, think, reflect and ask questions in the same way they might have done if they had entered a more unfamiliar arena (p. 9)

Participants' accounts indicate that their early experiences in staffrooms may have encouraged a view of teaching as a "private thing".

All participants, with the exception of Robert, have described how they felt how their training as teachers was inadequate for the job they were expected to do. In addition, they found little professional help or support from colleagues in dealing with the difficulties they experienced as young teachers. Linda (p. 82) and Ben (p. 66) described staffrooms where the atmosphere did not encourage them to look for help. And there is evidence that this situation continues for young teachers still. This is expressed very forcefully by Cathy (p. 76) when she says that she would "be very, very slow" to offer to help to young colleagues who she might see as having difficulties. Conor also feels that new teachers beginning in second-level school do not receive very good support from colleagues. Another example of this lack of professional support for young teachers was given by a colleague with whom I worked some years ago. He was an enthusiastic young teacher who had been teaching for just a few years before leaving the classroom. He told me that he had been trying new teaching methods in class, and wanted to discuss these with his colleagues and get their advice, but found them very reluctant to get involved in serious debate. One of them in particular said to him on a number of occasions "Mick, you'll learn", and my colleague said that the sad thing was that he was beginning to believe it. Another sad commentary is that he believed that the man who said this to him had been himself an enthusiastic young teacher ten years earlier.

This early experience of teachers may be very significant in the creation and perpetuation of a staffroom culture in which privacy is valued and guarded to the extent of isolating teachers from the possibility of professional support. When young teachers learn early on that they are expected to be self-reliant, not to show weakness, and not to discuss certain aspects of their teaching, and when they operate in this environment for a number of years, it is very likely that they will accept this as normal, and when, in turn, new younger teachers come into the staffroom, they will be treated in similar fashion. Thus the culture perpetuates itself as Nias (1996: 1) explains:

Neither cognition nor feeling can be separated from the social and cultural forces which help to form them and which are in turn shaped by them ... These influences themselves have historical, social and cultural roots and context which transmit belief systems and perpetuate social and organisational structures.

The way teachers observe colleagues

Despite the fact that four of the participants have not shared their teaching with their colleagues, there is evidence that they have formed opinions on who are good teachers and who are not. In Robert's case (p. 101), he knew that if a discipline matter was referred to him from certain teachers, then it was serious, but from others he would not be so sure. He refers to some acting "unfairly and [with] a bit of vindictiveness", and to cases where a students were put outside the door in contravention of school policy. It is clear from the words he uses that he does not approve of such actions, but there is nothing he can do. This is also very evident in his story about the examination centre incident (p. 102); there was nowhere in the school where he could raise the matter. Cathy (p. 76) also refers to observing teachers having difficulties, saying that "the noise out of the classroom would be the first indicator". But she would definitely not interfere or offer suggestions, even though she is a senior teacher in her school. Teachers also recognise some of their colleagues as 'good' teachers. For example, Linda admired a colleague's ability to organise her classes in groups.

I used envy Marie now for example, she would have them doing projects and they would all be working together and they would be looking for sellotape and they would be running over here for tippex and I would say 'how does she stick it?'

But she never learned from Marie how to do it herself.

So, teachers are constantly making judgements on, and being judged by, their colleagues. I believe that the nature of these judgements is an unspoken part of the structure within which teachers work, and frames their experience. And teachers can often be the harshest critics of their colleagues. But the culture of privatism is so strong in many staffrooms that when a colleague is judged to be struggling, or acting unfairly, there is often no way to make an intervention or offer help. And furthermore, teachers will often defend colleagues against criticism even though they may be uncomfortable with their actual practice. This raises issues of loyalty and trust, and their meaning for teachers.

Culture of the expert

The division of knowledge into 'subjects' in second-level education leads to teachers being seen (and seeing themselves) as 'experts' in their subject areas. This is evident in participants' accounts, for example when Conor (p. 94) says that teachers "have a

big fear of discussing their actual subject because they have a big fear of not knowing as much as the other person of their subject.” Linda (p. 86) spoke of how her lack of confidence in her standard of spoken Irish made it difficult for her to collaborate with a colleague.

I had nearly a complex about Mary in the sense that she was so fluent at Irish and I wasn't. And I used nearly be terrified ... to talk to Mary because I felt she would say 'this one hasn't a notion'

Cathy (p. 77) experienced this culture of the expert from a different perspective. One of the most hurtful experiences of her career, she said, was having her right to teach geography questioned by colleagues on the grounds that she did not have this as a subject in her degree.

This culture spreads its tentacles further in some staffrooms, requiring that teachers be expert in their relationships with students. Thus, for example, Cathy described also how she would be unwilling to admit to having difficulties at a staff meeting (p. 77) for fear that it would be taken as a sign of weakness. This culture of the expert thus contributes to isolation and absence of collegiality.

This culture was directly challenged, with positive outcomes, in the Mol an Óige¹⁷ project (Mol an Óige, 2000a: 29), and by Jeffers (2006).

Trust in the staffroom

It is evident from all participants that there are aspects of a teacher's work which are simply not legitimate topics for discussion between staff members. Conor and Linda referred to the fear of discussing one's actual subject with colleagues. The unwillingness to allow oneself to be seen teaching was common to all except Ben. A reticence about offering help when a colleague is perceived to be having difficulty is another feature of school staffrooms. Ben (p. 66) spoke of an experience in his early years in teaching, where a senior colleague who had observed the difficulties he was having expressed surprise that he had survived until after Christmas, but had offered no help. Cathy (p. 76) spoke of seeing younger teachers in her school having difficulty, but of being unwilling to intervene or to offer assistance. So, the cycle

¹⁷ The Mol an Óige project developed a strategy which it called Collaborative Action Planning. Based on an action research approach, and focussing on teachers' own learning from the process, it established teams of teachers within schools who worked collaboratively to identify, plan for, and address the needs of selected students.

continues to reproduce itself. She also spoke of unwillingness among teachers to openly admit to experiencing difficulties:

I think all the teachers, even the more seasoned ones are afraid that the blame [for having difficulties] will be pinpointed on themselves

And she adds that she herself would be “slow enough” to speak openly of any difficulties in class in case some of her colleagues would think “why doesn't that one retire from the job. She is way gone past it”. These comments betray a very strong culture of isolation among staff, and an unwillingness or inability to discuss issues which are at the core of the job that all teachers do. The idea that ‘blame’ would attach to having difficulties in a classroom is a very significant statement. It presupposes that ‘good’ teachers should not have difficulties. Despite the fact that all participants have spoken of struggle as central to the job, it seems there are still many staffrooms where it is not possible to admit to or discuss this struggle.

Conor spoke of fear; “teachers have a big fear of discussing their actual subject ... whereas discussing issues around the subject, there is not as much fear of that”. Ben spoke of having “grown up in the culture [where] if you were to express how badly you were getting on it was seen as negative thing ... so I was very slow to look for help”. Robert, in his role as year head, felt able to trust some of his colleagues more than others, and spoke of attempting to offer help to colleagues only to be rebuffed (p. 101).

These observations raise the issue of trust between colleagues in the staffroom. It seems that whatever trust exists is insufficient to allow teachers to discuss some of the issues that are most central to their teaching. I believe the issue of trust to be very important in exploring the nature of staffroom culture. Hargreaves (2002: 394) claims that teachers often have difficulty in dealing with conflict and often attempt to avoid conflict by “establishing norms of politeness and non-interference, or by clustering together only with like-minded colleagues who share their ideas and beliefs”. Airing disagreement involves significant risk, and is only likely to happen where trust exists. He adds that trust cannot be presumed in organisations; it must be built and won. The trust needed in organisations is more than *personal trust* based on deep friendships; it is a *professional trust*, based:

... not on deep personal knowledge, but on explicit or implicit norms, principles or understandings of how to work together and what to expect of each other as fellow professionals. Trust here is a process, not a state – something that people work towards as a matter of principle and of professional commitment. (p. 395)

He describes trust as the “emotional catalyst” for productive collaboration among teachers; and both vertical and lateral trust are important. So, it is clear that professional trust is an essential ingredient in such collaboration. It is clear also, however, from the accounts of participants that such trust is largely absent from their staffrooms. Airing disagreements, or dealing with conflict, is not part of the culture as experienced by most of them. Robert (p. 102) spoke of having no way of dealing with an issue (the incident in the exam centre,) in which he felt his values were assaulted. Cathy’s account illustrates a staffroom where ‘norms of politeness and non-interference’ are very strong. For Linda, the staffroom was a place where personal friendships were very important, but there is little evidence of the kind of professional trust which Hargreaves describes; she felt unable to discuss her teaching or her subject with her colleague with whom she was very friendly. Ben’s descriptions of the various staffrooms he has been part of also give much evidence of absence of professional trust. On the other hand, he has experienced a staffroom where a new principal managed to create a new atmosphere and where levels of trust and sharing between staff did increase. He achieved this by having an open and caring attitude himself, and by encouraging all to recognise and admit difficulties and to listen to suggestions. He did this at staff and subject meetings and also informally in the staffroom.

It seems to me that establishing cultures of professional trust and collegiality among staffs is one of the major challenges facing Irish education planners.

Language: articulating tacit knowledge

In reflecting with my participants on the themes emerging in the study, we came to realise that the everyday language we used as teachers was inadequate to conceptualise or describe our tacit knowledge. Linda says that being involved as a participant in this research was like “holding a mirror to me, the way I work”, adding that she had never articulated what she was doing in the way that we had constructed together in this study; that she was busy just “getting on with it”. For example, responding to what I had written about her use of humour (p. 87 & 129), she said that she had never considered it in the context of relationship. Yet, she did say that there were some class groups with whom she would not have got on so well where she would not have used humour in this way, thus acknowledging that relationship was the context within which the humour was possible. Her knowledge and judgement in this matter was tacit, unarticulated and contextual. (This, as Atkinson & Claxton (2000) point out, does not mean that the knowledge is any less valid). Her

comments also tie in with what Nias (1996: 2) observed; that “most of the [teachers] I know are too busy doing to have time to think about what they are feeling”.

Conor said that he had rarely if ever in his career had conversations of the kind we had had during this process. He felt that most teachers would agree with how the findings of this research describe their work, “but it has not become part of teachers’ language ... they would be afraid to expose themselves using language like this because it is less than macho”. Ben also spoke about how he observed language developing through our conversations.

Thus, an important finding of this study is that, though teachers know intuitively how to act in specific situations, they do not have the language to articulate this knowledge. This does not invalidate the knowledge, but it does make it more difficult to share and develop practice between themselves. Hence, as van Manen (1995: 38) says, when teachers are asked how they handle specific situations, they tend to answer in generalities, stories, complaints, anecdotes, or observations. He claims teachers’ stories of how they deal with specific situations are often at odds with methodological, philosophical and theoretical accounts of teacher decision-making and practice as in the professional literature and research reports.

There are two important consequences of this dilemma. The first is that without a language to describe their practice, real sharing and collegiality in staffrooms is much more difficult to achieve. The second aspect of this dilemma is that teachers have to work in a world where the current language is one of rationality. This is the language which frames how they are judged, and it is the language in which they are expected to account publicly for themselves. But, in focusing on concepts such as objectives, observable behaviour and causality, it is a language which fails to value the affective aspects of what teachers do. In this important sense, it is incapable of relating to the reality of school life for either teacher or student, to *the detriment of both*. In order to publicly describe and defend their work in a convincing manner, teachers must develop an alternative language which can describe their “personal practical knowledge”, the very basis on which education depends.

Relationships

Introduction to this section

The centrality of relationship in teaching has emerged as major theme in participants accounts. Relationships are the context within which teaching and learning take place. In this regard, Noddings (1992: 36) states:

So, at bottom, subject matter cannot carry itself. Relation, except in very rare occasions, precedes an engagement with subject matter. Caring relations can prepare children for an initial receptivity to all sorts of experiences and subject matters.

She adds that students will do things for people they like and trust. They “listen to people who matter to them and to whom they matter”.

Hargreaves (1999: 104) states:

Leading-edge teachers demonstrate how developing emotionally rich relationships with pupils provides a solid foundation for really successful teaching and learning.

So, ‘good’ relationships are a pre-requisite for ‘good’ teaching.

The work of teaching is unusual in that teachers work with children in groups. So, they must establish relationships with the group, as well as with individuals, both within and outside of the group. In this section, I examine some of the themes relating to relationship which emerge from participants’ accounts in Chapter 4.

Complexity and range of relationships

The relationships that teachers form with students are structured by the nature of school and the community it serves. Teachers spend a very large amount of time in the company of children, individually and in groups, and form relationships which are long-lasting (minimum one year). These relationships are developed in confined areas (the classroom and school environment), which adds to their intensity. Acting *in loco parentis*, they must take into account a wide range of concerns; they are responsible for the child’s safety, welfare and personal development as well as his/her education. Only parents have a wider responsibility and, in their case, for fewer children (usually!). Teachers form relationships with students as a class group, with individuals within that group, and with individuals and groups outside the classroom. In addition, they must mediate relationships between students themselves. This is illustrated by Conor when he described how he attempted to give the weak student status with his peers (p. 92) and by Linda with her ‘hard man’ example (p. 87). Both of these stories also give evidence that teaching in the classroom situation is about

much more than just imparting knowledge: it involves the teacher in multi-layered, complex processes of thought, feeling and intuition. These are the things that use up the 'background energy' referred to by Conor. Linda spoke of the conflict between the requirement for Leaving Certificate points and her desire to give students a love and understanding of poetry. In Ben's retreats he tries to establish an atmosphere and a set of relationships among the class where it is possible for students to tell their stories of being hurt, and come to terms with the reality of being hurt. And just consider this in the context of his story (p. 69) with the second year girl and her class, and how he sought to move on from that incident so that she and they (and he himself) could participate fully in a retreat of the kind he described (p. 63), later in the year. Managing that feat alone calls upon a very complex set of human qualities and interpersonal skills.

Psychic rewards for teachers

Teachers work is done mainly with children. They probably spend more of their time in the company of children than any other adult (other than parents); certainly more than almost any other professional. A striking finding in this research is that participants enjoy, or at least are very comfortable in the company of young people; for example, Cathy (p. 78) walking down town with students, Linda (p. 86) being so involved in extra-curricular activities, Robert (p. 97) in games, Ben (p. 63) in organising retreats.

Hargreaves (1999), citing Lortie (1995), states that the psychic rewards for teachers are of three kinds: firstly through achieving moral outcomes with students; secondly from connecting children to school and learning; and thirdly from benefiting all students, not just a few. His own research found that teachers derived their greatest enjoyment from working with students, and that the positive emotion they brought to the classroom was the strongest, sometimes the only source of encouragement in teachers' work (p. 92).

These findings from the literature were evident in the accounts of my participants also. When asked what gives them most satisfaction from their time in teaching, all pinpoint times when they see their students learn and grow. They also speak of sharing students' excitement and joy in their successes. Conor (p. 90) speaks of his "actual pure joy" at seeing students learn something new, and says he gets fulfilment from the realisation that this is partly because of the way he taught it. For Cathy, "it's the day you go into class and you're telling them something and there's a dawning on their little faces" that gives her most joy. She gave as an example:

We were doing a musical and there was this lad above and he ... was trying to get a step to music. And before we were finished he had got the rhythm and the music stopped and he was still tapping his feet. And to see just the look, 'I have done it'.

Linda, Cathy and Robert refer to examination results as giving them satisfaction, but emphasise that this comes from seeing all students do well, not just the high fliers. So, the satisfaction is, as Lortie says, from seeing *all* students benefit, not just a few.

Robert speaks of “seeing some of these lads in after life and they have made a success in their lives ...” as a source of satisfaction. For Linda it is “just seeing them change and progress really and with that the bit of self confidence”. For Conor, it is that “I could always meet a student on the street after they left and chat and talk to them as, almost as not teacher and student kind of relationship”. These are moral outcomes. So, all three kinds of psychic rewards for teachers, described by Lortie (1975), are evidenced by my participants.

Extra-curricular activities

All my participants put effort, four of them very considerable, into out-of-classroom involvement with their students. All viewed this involvement with students as one way of providing educational opportunities and experiences for students which were not possible within the classroom. This was also Ben’s motive in organising retreats. They found that extra-curricular activities enabled them to establish new, different kinds of relationships with students, ones that would not have been possible within the classroom, and they found that these relationships in turn had beneficial effects in the classroom. Cathy (p. 78) drew a clear distinction between classroom and extra-curricular when she said working with students on the musical was like “an indiscipline within a discipline”, a place there they could relax and be themselves, presumably unlike in the formal classroom.

Writing about this, Hargreaves (1999: 104) argues that “in general, secondary teaching seems devoid of this emotional intensity” and that it is difficult to establish strong emotional connections within the classroom. Many second-level teachers, he found, especially men, gain their psychic rewards with students outside the classroom where “insight and positive relationship are achieved ... and where teachers have the chance of seeing their pupils and being seen by them in a new light” (p. 101).

My participants did not agree that their classrooms were emotionally barren for them. Yet it is interesting that all put so much effort into extra-curricular activities, that they spoke about the different kinds of relationships they formed through such

activities, and that some of the highlights of their teaching careers occurred during extra-curricular involvement. For example, despite being a very exam-focused teacher, Cathy (p. 78) instanced an example from extra-curricular work to illustrate what gives her most joy. Linda (p. 86) spoke of “a sing song and a bit of craic”, of developing a bond, and of seeing them differently and of them seeing the teacher in a different light also. In my own case, it was working with students outside the classroom that I felt my values and practice most in tune. Robert and Cathy both commented on the fact that when they meet students in later life, it is the games (with Robert) or musicals (with Cathy) that they remember, far more than anything from the classroom.

In summary, I believe many teachers become involved in extra-curricular activities as a means of providing their students with the kind of educational opportunities and experiences which they believe important, the kind of experiences that are in line with their own values; and that this is why so many teachers instance examples from extra-curricular involvement as highlights of their careers.

This extra-curricular involvement is all voluntary. This shows that teachers’ motivation is intrinsic, not extrinsic. We must recognise that current trends towards a low-trust culture of increasing regulation and performativity will not motivate teachers generally, and in particular in the area of extra-curricular involvement (e.g., Codd, 2005; Hargreaves, 2000; Morgan *et al.*, 2010; Hogan, 2003).

Caring

It is clear from my participants that they care deeply for their students. This is more evident listening to the audio recordings of our conversations than in the written transcripts. In Linda’s account, caring for her students shines through as perhaps her greatest motivation. Cathy describes a number of incidents with deep feeling, for example when describing the system of discipline in her school as “piling sin upon sin” (p. 79), or when she describes talking to students in the school yard during break. Ben’s handling of the incident with the girl (p. 69) demonstrates his deep care also.

Noddings (1992) states that the need for care in our present culture is acute; children, especially adolescents, feel uncared for in schools. She says: “the temptation is to identify and answer these needs technically.” But, “caring cannot be achieved by formula” (p. xi); it takes place within a relationship. In a caring relationship, both parties must contribute in characteristic ways; the carer by “engrossment” and the

cared for by showing that the caring has been received. This recognition now becomes part of what the carer receives, and the caring is completed. This caring may only be for a moment, but it is real. She gives as an example the moment in which nurse and patient meet as a 'caring occasion'. "This is obviously very different from defining a medical encounter as a problem-solving event. Problem solving is involved, of course, but it is preceded by a moment of receptivity" (p. 24). Such momentary caring encounters are important in the context of the busy classrooms of teachers and students; moments such as Linda's bit of humour or Conor's engagement with the "shy young lad" to give him status with his peers (p. 92).

As Noddings points out, caring works both ways; the student showing that the care has been received provides the teacher with sustenance. However, the teacher suffers a "dreadful loss of energy when their students do not respond" (p. 17).

Difficulties in relationships

Comparing his experiences in adult education with second-level teaching, Conor found relationships a far greater challenge in second-level.

The difficulty in maintaining a relationship with younger people is that you're often harassing them to keep going and to keep interested and to keep learning whereas in fact they don't want to. They're not motivated. So that constantly chips away at whatever relationship you might have formed with them. Difficult enough in that situation to maintain a relationship.

Ben recognises also that some teachers have difficulty in establishing and maintaining relationships (p. 68), and that where such relationships are strained, the effect on students can be negative. However, it is not only 'poor' teachers who experience such difficulties. He admits himself that he also has difficulties from time to time, as he exemplifies in his story about the classroom incident with the second-year girl (p. 69). Linda also adverts to difficulties she had, and to times when she reacted in ways which might have resulted in hurt for her students. She also adds that she apologised to students on a number of occasions, sometimes publicly, and that this is an integral part of relationship.

It should be recognised that the role of teacher almost automatically involves difficulties in relationships with students. As Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1999) point out, part of the teacher's role is to be the person against whom young people rebel and test boundaries.

How discipline systems are constructed and operated in schools has a major bearing on the relationships in the school. Discipline issues arise when a teacher has a difficulty with a student or group of students, or *vice versa*. In such cases, the teacher has recourse to the school's disciplinary system. What the student (and teacher) expect and experience when this happens is very important. I have always believed that when the matter is referred to the next level, the role of the year head (or the person to whom the referral is made) is to seek to create understandings so that the teacher and student (or group) can resume their relationship and work together more successfully than before, not just to administer punishment. Applying sanctions (or not) can help re-establish relationships provided they are accompanied by new understandings; sanctions applied without understanding will be resented as punishment, may be seen as unjustified, and will not help re-establish relationships between teacher and student. Robert provides evidence that he believes in a similar approach. However, both he (p. 100) and Cathy (p. 125) have described discipline systems in their schools which do not conform to their professional values. Both suggest that discipline systems working within relationships might be more effective, but feel that these legalistic approaches are maybe necessary because of the need for accountability.

It must be noted also that there are trends in society which militate against relationships in the school setting, as instanced and described by O Sullivan (2005: 171):

Health and Safety, Equality and Education and Welfare legislation is invoked in a process that normalises the manner in which teachers-and-pupils and teachers-and-teachers relate to one another through the construction of protocols, prohibitions and designation of 'best practice'. The role of 'trust' in the pedagogical relationship is dissipated, professional judgement, even teacher agency itself, becomes circumscribed and vocation is recast as dedication to one's attributed role. Education's claims to be unique among service providers are stripped away.

Cathy's story (p. 79) illustrates how guidelines for child protection can compromise relationships.

Relationships as an end in themselves

As Nias (1996) suggests, the relationships which teachers build up with their students not only provide the context for their learning, but are part of what students learn. Participants in this study show an acute awareness of this. For example when Linda sits beside her weaker student in class, it is because the fact of doing so will "maybe ... help him to think that he is worth it" (p. 127). Cathy says that "just to take a child

aside and let them know that you really do watch them very carefully – that realisation even, for a child is very big”. She also speaks of modelling behaviour; “if children see you working hard, it will bring them along; they’ll work or try to work. If you do nothing, they’ll do nothing”. Ben (p. 63) speaks of the retreats as in some senses the climax of his year’s work with his classes, and what he tries to achieve here is for them to see and feel that they “were loved in some sense and to try and trust this love”. For second year retreats he brings some adults from the community to work with him and the students. And the aim is “to help young people to come to terms with ... being hurt, and then the possibility of healing”, and to allow them “to have this experience in a school setting”. The aim here is to create an environment in which students will experience love or healing, not just be told about it.

Power

Teachers, in their relationships with children, operate from a position of considerable power. Yet it is often a contested power – contested both by the students and by their parents, the contestation created by the conflicting needs and demands of parents, students, society and educational authorities which are mediated through the teacher. Students are often captive in the classroom, being there involuntarily, without the opportunity of either directing the content of what is taught or of moving elsewhere. However, they do, individually or collectively, have the power to withdraw cooperation. So the teacher’s power alone cannot dictate influence or cooperation. This must be earned through the quality of the relationships as well as through other teaching qualities.

My findings indicate an understanding of these realities by participants. They acknowledged the positions of power which they held, but also recognised the limits of that power, and the danger of abusing it.

Robert’s reaction (p. 102) in the case of the girl who was sent out of the examination centre indicates clearly that he saw this as an abuse of power by the teacher involved. Conor said that one of his values as a teacher would be that “that I would be as friendly and humane to my students as I can be”, thus acknowledging the power that the teacher has to be inhumane to students also. Ben believes that power creates a dynamic that can separate the teacher from the student (who, he says, is in some senses, powerless). But “good teaching can help a student come alive”. This echoes Hargreaves (2001) contention that emotional labour may be fulfilling or exploitative depending on whether power relationships are managed in accordance with teacher’s personal professional values.

Another aspect of the power relationship between teacher and students is the role of the peer group. Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1999) identify rebellion against adults as one aspect of peer groups (see p. 9), and say that this often finds its expression against teachers. The rebellion can refer to high level, major confrontation or, more frequently, to low level rejection of, or even indifference to what the teacher is attempting to teach. Being at the butt of such rebellion is something which teachers must accept as part of the job, and must learn how to respect, negotiate and work with. Participants' accounts are rich in examples of such respect, negotiation and collaborations with peer groups. Linda (p. 87) acknowledges some rare occasions when there would be a "public showdown", and she might end up putting a student outside the door, maybe "to save face I suppose for myself more so than for the child". She recognises their need to rebel, and even though she may have been provoked, she regrets having reacted; "I mean I am the adult. I can cope with that". Cathy also recognises this, saying that while students might be very "lippy", they hate to be asked questions in Irish class because "they don't want to make a fool of themselves in front of their friends. Not in front of us, they don't care about us". She was able to use this as one means of maintaining control. Ben (p. 63) obviously uses the peer group in a positive sense in creating the setting for students to be open and to validate each other in the retreat setting. Indeed, much of the effort by teachers in out-of-classroom work with students is designed to enable them to influence the peer group and to annexe peer pressure to educational ends. This, as well as, for example, Ben's (p. 69), Linda's (p. 87) and Conor's (p. 92) stories also show respect, negotiating and collaborating with the peer group.

Humour

Linda (p. 87) and Conor (p. 92) give examples of how they used humour in the classroom. Consideration of humour between teacher and students is very interesting. Humour is always slightly risky. It can only happen within boundaries and within a trustful, warm relationship. It is a way of gently stretching boundaries, of being inclusive, of sharing at a personal level. But there is always the risk of it going wrong, being hurtful (to the student), or falling flat (which can expose the teacher). It, thus, requires sensitivity, judgement and a personal investment on the part of the teacher. This recalls Palmer's assertion that connecting with students requires the teacher to know and trust his or her selfhood, and to be "willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning" (2007: 11)

Linda's story reminds us also that fun and humour should pervade everyday activities in the classroom. This stands in contrast with thinking which holds that fun activities are built into the school programme, where fun is sometimes thought of as an activity rather than as arising from relationships. Fun as activity involves less risk and is safer, but loses out in very significant ways. Relationship is something that seems to build on itself, to have a gestalt that is more than the sum of activities.

However, humour in the form of sarcasm can also be used destructively. This was not explored in my conversations.

Selfhood

My participants' accounts show their personal involvement in their work; not only because it makes their work more efficient, but because they are part of their work; and their interactions with their students are part of their students' education.

Personal exposure

Participants' accounts give many examples of deeply personal involvement in their teaching. For example, Ben's story of the incident with the girl (p. 87) gives an indication of the immediacy and the intensity of the classroom, and how his whole personhood was called upon in the situation. It shows the potential for serious hurt for both student and teacher, something which is rarely mentioned or understood in public discourse. It is easy to imagine the hurt the girl might have experienced in this situation had it been handled differently (indeed, she might have experienced considerable hurt as it was). It is equally easy to imagine the hurt the teacher might have experienced, and how that might have inflamed the situation. The need for resilience on the part of the teacher, to be continually nourished, not to become worn down is easy to understand when considered in this light.

In situations such as this, it is from the very selfhood of the teacher that he or she will respond. A response such as Ben's can only come from within a relationship which is authentic (even if it is a difficult one). Though there are guiding principles, there are no impersonal strategies for such a relationship; it must involve the teacher as a real person, not just as a disembodied 'professional'. There are no policies and procedures which will guide a teacher in how to feel in such a situation. And the immediate message to the student will come from the interpersonal reaction of the

teacher, not from the actions he or she subsequently takes. Yet it is only for these subsequent actions that guidelines are provided in mission statements and staff handbooks. How to feel comes out of the deepest selfhood; out of the person and the professional that the teacher has become at that point in his or her life's journey. This should be recognised and included in programmes of teacher professional development and support. As Nias (1996: 1) states:

If one takes the view that the emotions are rooted in cognition, then one cannot separate feeling from perception, affectivity from judgement. It follows that one cannot help teachers develop their classroom management skills without also addressing their emotional reactions and responses and the attitudes, values and beliefs which underlie these.

Ben's example above relates to a situation of challenge. Participants gave examples from other aspects of their teaching also. For example, Linda's use of humour (p. 87) in her 'hard man' story is an indication of authenticity in her relationship with an individual student and with a class. It is also an example of where she is willing to take a risk for the sake of deepening and widening that relationship. Where such a risk goes sour, teachers feel badly about themselves, as Ben said he might have earlier in his career, as well as for their students. Indeed, Linda herself says that on an occasion when a child might have felt put down by her, "that would hurt me a lot". It is clear that Robert was personally hurt by seeing a girl being treated, as he felt, unfairly in the examinations hall. So, teachers very 'selves' are engaged in their work.

Personal investment

Non-teachers may be surprised at the extent to which this discussion might seem to suggest that teachers are thin-skinned, susceptible to hurt. I strongly believe that it is difficult for people who have not experienced the second-level classroom to envisage the intensity and the complexity of the relationships. Public debate which is rarely interested in the emotional aspects of these relationships – or, indeed of the relationships themselves – is unlikely to help them to understand. The idea that, as Ben said, "your personality does become very exposed and that, at times, is dangerous" is not one that is often considered or understood, I believe, by those framing educational policy or even by teachers themselves.

Good teaching, then, requires a deep personal investment. Ryan et al. (2004: 61, citing Ancilla, 1995: 159) say that "the best tutoring comes out of an understood self as distinct from a mastered self". Nias (1996: 1) says that "teachers grow and develop only when they also face themselves"

A common experience of participants is of struggle; a lifelong struggle to ensure their values are lived in their practice (see p. 134). The nature of their work has required them to make deep emotional investments in their careers and in the welfare of their students. Nias (1996: 6) also addresses this issue and, specifically, why teachers often seem to be defensive when challenged.

Teachers cannot call upon agreed technical or moral principles to justify the rightness of the professional judgements or the ethical priorities which are central to their working 'selves'. Instead, they have to rely on validation by others, although of its very nature this is open to challenge and debate. The more profound their commitment to particular ideals, goals or priorities the more extreme their reaction when these are threatened or contested. Passion in teaching is political, precisely because it is also personal.

So, the personal and the professional in teaching are intertwined. Cathy (p. 75) demonstrates that this applies even in teaching methodologies, which might have been thought of as a 'technical aspect' of teaching. In trying new approaches to her teaching she acknowledges that they may not work; she may end up wondering "why in the name of God did I change from my old way of doing it, didn't it always work?". It requires courage and commitment to try new methodologies, and a willingness to make herself vulnerable in front of her students and colleagues. Discussing this point, Conor noted that "if you change your act, you might end up looking like a right clown"

The search for wholeness

The premise on which Palmer's (2007) book is based is that good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; rather, it comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. For Palmer:

Identity lies in the intersection of the diverse forces that make up my life, and integrity lies in relating to these forces in ways that bring me wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death. (2007: 14)

He believes that good teachers create a complex web of connections between themselves, their subject and their students so that their students can learn to draw such webs for themselves. And this involves them being able to trust their own selfhood, and make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning. So, teachers must try to get to know themselves, and must strive towards wholeness, or what he calls the "undivided self" so as to be authentic in their work. This is evident, for example, in Cathy's account (p. 73) where she says that "when we were severe on kids in my early years teaching, that came from my own inadequacies ... and, of course, a

terrible lack of self-esteem ... on my part". Ruth (2006: 54) refers to this wholeness also; saying liberation leadership is also a model of what good teachers do, and adds that "learning to be a leader is virtually the same process as becoming an integrated and healthy person".

The struggles which my participants' careers have exemplified have been triggered by this search for wholeness which would, in turn, allow for their values to be embedded in their practice. But very often, rather being recognised and supported in their efforts towards wholeness, they find themselves working in a culture where a 'self-protective' split of personhood from practice is encouraged by an academic culture that distrusts personal truth. As Palmer (2007) observes:

To reduce our vulnerability, we disconnect from student, from subjects, and even from ourselves. We build a wall between inner truth and outer performance, and we play-act the teacher's part ... in this culture, the self is not a source to be tapped but a danger to be suppressed, not a potential to be fulfilled but an obstacle to be overcome. (p. 17)

He asks the question: "how can the teacher's selfhood become a legitimate topic in education and in our public dialogues on educational reform?" (p. 3). This is also a fundamental question arising from this study.

Conor gave a salient interpretation of how teaching encroached on his personal life.

What I am going to say is that a teacher's personality changes when they are dealing with [second-level] students; you're more formal, you're more rigid, you're more guarded, and that actually does spill out into your behaviour socially after school. And I often used to remark that it used to take me nearly two months of the summer holidays to shake that off.

In order to preserve that façade of teaching, you have to be a bit more ... formal, you have to keep your guard up all the time ... you're acting the role of "the teacher", and that does get into you ... [it comes from] keeping a distance, keeping a gap, keeping a level of aloofness because you won't want them to be coming in calling "how are you Conny, did you have a few pints last night" or something like that.

... It often used to annoy me to feel halfway through the summer holidays that I was becoming a different person, and then gradually once September came you got back into that, you got back into a little bit of a teacher mode and it did spill out after school.

In this, Conor is giving an account of what it is like to experience the 'divided self'. He talks of the 'facade of teaching', of 'acting the role of the teacher', of feeling annoyed at becoming a different person, of getting into a 'teacher mode'. I, and I believe many teachers, have experienced similar feelings. It echoes Palmer's

statement that we 'play-act' the teachers' part. We suppress the self, and a little of our authenticity, a little of ourselves as persons as well as teachers goes with it. The discomfort expressed by both Linda and Cathy about meeting past students is possibly another reference to a divided self, an acknowledgement that the teacher the students knew was not the full person. Of course, it would be neither possible nor appropriate for the teacher to reveal his or her whole person to students in the classroom. However, the struggle is for that which is revealed to be true to the teacher as a whole person, for it to draw on and represent a cross-section of the full selfhood of the teacher, not just a narrow 'teachery' aspect of that self. Moskvin (2006) echoes this point, arguing that the personality of the teacher is his or her main 'tool' of the job. Like the tools of any job, the personality suffers wear and tear, meaning the job carries a high "risk of personality and professional deformation" for the teacher, and "the exaggerated development of (professionally) essential qualities (in a teacher) can turn them into their own opposites, in this way reducing the effectiveness of the pedagogical effort and making life difficult for the schoolteacher" (p. 73). As examples she says a sense of discipline can turn into dogmatic adherence to universally accepted rules and directives; a sense of principle can turn into stubbornness against which there is no appeal; self control can turn into coldness.

Struggles and resilience

Struggles and compromises

I left teaching in 1994 after twelve years as principal. I was feeling the job becoming oppressive. I was finding myself unable to get things done which I regarded as important, and I was becoming more aware of ways in which I was unable to meet the needs of my students. I felt that, as principal, I carried a heavy responsibility to the students in my care, and to their parents, and I remember discussing this with a friend and saying that if I were not the very best person for the position, then I felt I had no moral right to remain in the post. And I was beginning to feel that maybe I was no longer the best person.

Very quickly upon leaving the principalship, I began to see the previous few years with new eyes. I came to articulate what had gradually undermined me as the constant compromises necessary between my values and what was possible. I came to realise that my values were not being embodied in my practice or in my school, and this had led to frustration, lack of confidence, and lack of fulfilment. With this came

guilt and remorse. Elliott (1998:186) says that teachers experience guilt when they “become aware of what they are doing ... (and) find that it is not consistent with the ways they would prefer to describe their conduct”. Over a period of about two years, I arrived at some kind of balance in my judgement of my period as principal, recognising the successes as well as the failures, and I learned to recognise that a person can only do so much.

However, the awareness from that time of compromising on my values lingered, so as I began this research, I questioned my participants about the matter. I was initially surprised and then puzzled by the fact that the experience did not seem to resonate strongly with them. Instead, their stories portrayed struggle as an integral part of their experience as teachers; struggle to achieve their ideals, struggle to balance the sometimes contradictory forces impinging on their work, struggle to keep positive, perhaps struggle to avoid compromising on one's principles. So, perhaps compromise is failure in this struggle; perhaps struggle is the positive way of viewing this aspect of one's experience, compromise the negative.

There is another aspect that might shed some light on the connection between struggle and compromise. The comprehension of compromise came to me, or at least was articulated by me after I had left my position as principal. I had had other emotions – frustration, sadness, oppression – while in the job, but it was only afterwards that I assigned compromise as the root of these. Perhaps in the position, I was so busy ‘struggling’ that I did not have time to analyse clearly. Perhaps also, in the position, I could not afford to acknowledge, even to myself, the reality of compromise because of the potentially devastating effects it would have, having invested so much of my career and my life in the job. This was partly what prompted me to choose two participants, Linda and Robert, who had recently left teaching; to see if their experiences mirrored mine in any way. It is interesting that they spoke about loss of motivation in their later years, attributed in both cases to their respective schools dropping enrolments and consequently having fewer ambitious, more able students. In addition, Linda was slightly more critical of the constraints within which she worked, and especially of herself as a teacher, than the others. And Robert spoke of poorer discipline which he described as intolerable for him. Interestingly, Conor spoke much more critically of second-level (which he has now left, having moved into further education) than of his current situation. So, perhaps a retrospective view of a career, where the struggle is no longer the daily reality, allows a different perspective, one which must perhaps be suppressed while the struggle is still in progress. In my own case, I have been back as principal since 2000, and I

believe that I have not been as conscious of compromise in my practice since then as in my practice prior to 1994. This may be because I have become a different kind of principal in the meantime or, more likely perhaps, because I have again become absorbed in the struggle.

So, in this section my findings are about struggle. And I bear in mind that struggle is a collective as well as an individual experience.

Struggle for values

All participants' accounts give examples of struggle; frequently struggle between structure and agency (Day *et al.*, 2006), struggle to keep their values alive in their practice. Their struggles were career-long and very individual; they involve the personal as well as the professional domains. At times they succeed and bring great joy, and at other times there is failure which can be very hurtful. Ben shows how these struggles involved him not only as a teacher but also as a person, and how his growth as a teacher emerged from his growth as a person (p. 65). As a teacher, he had to develop his understanding and learn new methodologies which would enable him to engage with his students in ways that would allow his values to be experienced in the classroom. As a person, his growth enabled him understand and empathise with his students, to deal with conflict, and to remain a bit removed from the emotion of the situation. And as part of this growth, he believes teachers have "to go through some difficult times". He adds: "I have found a peace with where I am. And I think it is out of that peace that my teaching now comes in a much more integrated way". But he recognises that the struggle continues and that this situation may not last (p. 63).

In our conversations, Linda frequently expressed doubt about what she was doing, about its value. For example, she sat beside weaker students because she felt that it would give their self-esteem a "bit of a boost". However, she adds (p. 83) that she is unsure of how useful this kind of help is in terms of academic achievement. Thus, her value of "looking out for the underdog" is in conflict with pressures for academic achievement. She describes this also in relation to teaching poetry where she found that examination pressures forced her to hand out notes on poems; "teaching by photocopier" (p. 84):

but I would always say to them look, this poem, you know, there are as many interpretations of this poem as there are students here in this room, everyone has their own interpretation of that. So from that point of view I suppose I was giving them the idea that, well, their opinion about it is valid as well, but at the

same time the fact that you were dealing with an exam [you don't have time to develop this]

Some may react to this piece by suggesting that with better teaching methodologies, Linda might have been able to reconcile her practice and her values more effectively, but the significant thing is the effort to make this reconciliation. Linda, elsewhere in her interview (p. 85) professes not to have been very creative about methodologies. But this piece nonetheless shows that she struggled to keep her values alive, that she was aware of the limitations of her ability to do so in the face of competing pressures, and that this was a source of deep frustration for her. This finding, that while teaching methodologies may help keep one's values alive in practice, they do not remove this struggle, is echoed by all participants.

Ben throws further light on this interplay between methodology and struggle in teaching. He admits that he never learned properly how to teach, and that some younger religion teachers are much better prepared in terms of having a range of class planning and teaching methodologies to call on. And he recognises the value of these for the task of teaching. However, the fact that these younger religion teachers in his school are no longer willing to teach religion as a non-exam subject at senior cycle is an indication that technical teaching skills are not enough (p. 65). Becoming comfortable in teaching religion as a means of helping young people to learn "how to think about things that are important in life" (p. 61), without the scaffolding of the examination system, can only come from an inner strength and peace which can be arrived at through continuous commitment and struggle. As Day (2004) states: "it takes passion to continue to believe in and be actively engaged in one's moral purposes and not to default under pressures of effort and energy". Palmer's (2007: 10) adds that "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher".

It should be clear from this discussion that the values for which teachers struggle are their own; what Goodson (2004) refers to as teachers' professional beliefs and personal missions. Recent official documents on education also refer to values; but not to the professional values of teachers. The reference in these documents is to the values of interest groups (e.g. Ireland, Government of, 1995) or lists of values drawn up by committee and to be passed on to students (e.g., National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009). The values underpinning teacher professionalism, listed by the Teaching Council (Teaching Council, 2007), are those to which the council wishes teachers to aspire.

Struggle to know the self

The struggle for values is part of a wider struggle to know the self. Palmer (2007) says, “the entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life” (p. 2). This is echoed in the accounts of participants where their social lives, their families, their children, indeed their growth as persons, contributed to their growth as teachers¹⁸. There is a clear implication from what they have said that their growth as teachers has been bound up with getting to know themselves as persons, getting to know their inner selves, and that the pursuit of this self-knowledge is at the core of the struggles which their careers as teachers have visited upon them. The effort to get to know the self also involves accepting the self. Everyone has limitations as well as possibilities and, as teachers we must learn to accept and be comfortable with both.

Reflection and critical reflection

In their struggle to live their values in their practice, participants show deep levels of reflection on the needs of their students, and on how best they can meet these needs. For example, Linda’s accounts of how she sits with weaker students, uses humour, and how she corrects homework, Ben’s story of about the girl (p. 69) and his rationale for his retreats, Robert’s reflections on discipline and the value of games all show that teachers have reflected deeply on what they do and why.

Brookfield (1995: 4), however, draws a distinction between reflection and critical reflection, saying that reflection becomes critical when it has two distinct purposes.

The first is to understand how considerations of power undergird, frame and distort so many educational processes and interactions. The second is to question assumptions and practices that seem to make our teaching lives easier but that actually end up working against our own best long term interests – in other words, those that are hegemonic. (p.4)

He adds that becoming alert to the oppressive dimensions of our practice (many of which reflect an unquestioned acceptance of values, norms and practices defined for us by someone else) is often the first step in working more democratically and cooperatively with students and colleagues.

The evidence from most participants is that their reflection is not very critical in the sense that Brookfield describes. Cathy (p. 79) and Robert (p. 100) say they do not

¹⁸ This growth is not to be understood as linear and progressive; rather as something that waxes and wanes in tune with the ups and downs of life.

like, or even believe in the disciplinary systems in their schools, yet there is no evidence that they have questioned them fundamentally or tried to radically change them. Conor (p. 91) accepts the examination system even though even though he acknowledges its unfairness. In most cases, they have not engaged extensively with the national debate on education. This is apparent, for example, in their views on professionalism and the Teaching Council. Probably only in Ben's case has reflection led to significant first steps towards working democratically or cooperatively with colleagues; rather, the evidence is of frustration, resignation and a retreat into privatism. Ben's efforts (p. 66) to create a collaborative, democratic staffroom (and classroom) have been informed by his deep reflection and learning throughout his career.

It is easy to see why critical reflection is difficult; becoming alert to the oppressive dimensions of our practice can undermine our sense of efficacy and can leave us empty inside. Linda expressed this most clearly. Having read the final draft of the thesis, she commented that she had always "just" done her job of teaching without reflecting too much on it in. Maybe, she added, "this was in order to keep my sanity". Critical reflection requires supportive structures if it is not to result in pessimism or guilt; or, perhaps more accurately, to help us to cope with these emotions, to place them into perspective and to move forward with new practice. Thus, critical reflection in a supportive working environment is one of the most important ways in which teachers struggles can be managed and perhaps even resolved. It can build teacher's resilience.

Resilience

In a manner similar to the way participants in my study focused on struggle rather than compromise, I found that, while not avoiding negative experiences altogether, they also focused much more on the positive; and I was a little puzzled by that. For example, when Linda said that she tried to treat students as she would like a teacher to treat her children (p. 83), I asked, perhaps a little negatively, "do you think that that kind of concern made the job more stressful or more tiring or, maybe it made it more enjoyable too?" She responded positively "I would say more for the enjoyment and fulfilment of your own, you know, desires". There were many such occasions in my conversations. For example, Ben interprets his classroom story (p. 69) as positive even though many might have seen it otherwise.

These responses suggest important findings: that teachers are resilient, and that they get fulfilment and nourishment in their work with students. All referred to the joy or

satisfaction that the classroom afforded when things were going well; and all gave evidence of enjoying working with young people, and creating opportunities to do this in positive settings outside the classroom. This indicates that the emotional nourishment they receive from working with young people enables them to move on from negative experiences. This is corroborated in the literature. For example, Hargreaves (1999: 92) finds that teachers derived their greatest satisfaction from working with students. They particularly enjoyed “working with kids”, “the response of pupils”, and their “exuberance and enthusiasm”. Morgan *et al.* (2010: 2) examined *affective episodes* that happen every day and are the building blocks from which teachers’ emotional experience are constructed. They found that positive and negative happenings are not a mirror image of each other; the presence or absence of positive experiences is a much stronger contributor to teachers’ motivation and resilience than is the case with negative experiences.

Understanding of professionalism

In their descriptions of their own practice, all participants demonstrated a considerable range of personal qualities, skills, knowledge, competence and agency which should be part of any definition of professionalism in teaching. However, when asked to define what they understood by professionalism, there was a wide divergence of understandings. For Ben, “professionalism is having the skills necessary to make decisions for yourself in your teaching ... to recognise that you’re the expert ... in the sense that you should trust your own judgement”. Conor saw professionalism as meaning that the student feels that “they’re in capable hands; that there’s a method; that there’s a control, a demeanour, dress even; and awareness that there’s a respect for the person ... and a respect for privacy”. For Robert, being professional means being responsible, and “taking a certain amount of pride in your job; you’re getting paid for it. There’s an onus on you to do it and to do it properly. And if you’re not doing it properly, you deserve a rap across the knuckles”. Cathy understands professionalism very much in the form of bureaucratic imposition. She describes it variously as creating a distance between teacher and student and as having guidelines for teaching so that teachers are more accountable. For Linda, being more professional would have meant dealing better with difficult situations. And, certainly, there is no common understanding of professionalism among participants that would inspire and support their work or their careers. Nor was there any clear idea or interest in the role or workings of the Teaching Council.

I believe that this lack of engagement with the wider issues relating to their work is a serious matter; it enables decisions to be made in relation to education which do not reflect teachers' experiences, and thus have the potential to conflict with their values. Such potential exists in the current debate on teacher professionalism. It is important that teachers engage seriously with it.

Towards a way forward

The literature points to some ideas as to how more collaborative cultures can be created in staffrooms. Jeffers (2006: 205) offers one a suggestion.

Genuine professional collaboration between teachers has to be more than contrived cooperation, or mere cosiness, or the exchange of 'war stories' or exercises in mutual admiration. But these may be important milestones on the road to more open, collaborative school working environments.

Nias (1996: 6) promotes the idea of teachers sharing stories "about the structures and traditions within which they work".

(This) can help them to identify and understand different perspectives. It can also provide a forum for disagreement and challenge and so for the practice of the interpersonal skills involved in negotiation and debate.

Participants' comments on their own learning as participants in this research suggests that such a narrative approach has possibilities in this regard.

The focus on teachers' articulating their own learning, as well as collaborative planning, was important in building trust and collegiality in the Mol an Óige project (Mol an Óige, 2004b).

Hargreaves (2002) says that effective organisations depend on and thrive on trust. However, what he calls for is a "professional" trust which is based on "explicit or implicit norms, principles or understandings of how to work together and what to expect of each other as fellow professionals" rather than a personal trust based on friendships (p. 396). And such trust cannot be presumed; it must be built and continuously renewed through performance data, personnel evaluations, and various accountability processes.

Palmer (2007) gives an example of what he calls "clearness committees" which he uses as a means of sharing and of finding support from colleagues within clear boundaries. But he acknowledges that any such willingness to look for and accept

support involves risk. Discussing movements for change, he says that the decision to bring practice into congruence with values entails risk and can lead to anxiety and self-doubt; in order to meet like-minded people, “one must make visible one’s decision” (p. 179). This is a difficult step but, once made, like-minded people tend to appear. The response to the new principal in Ben’s account (p. 67) is evidence of this.

Hargreaves (2000) calls for teachers to form new alliances with parents, identifying their common interests on behalf of students, in order to combat the forces of neo-liberalism. To achieve this, he says that teachers will have to “become more publicly vulnerable and accessible” (p. 176).

What all of these suggestions have in common is a recognition that the creation of real collaboration requires that teachers be prepared to expose their vulnerability and take risks.

Main findings

The findings of this research are firstly that teaching and learning take place within a complex web of relationships, with the personhood of the teacher being central to the process; and secondly, that these are aspects not captured in public discourses on teaching. Nor are they mirrored in the way teachers describe their work, even among themselves. Indeed, teachers appear not to have developed a language in which to articulate these aspects of their work.

These findings are supported by the evidence from participants’ accounts of the privatisation, isolation and lack of collegiality which is mostly their everyday experience; in the struggles involved in their work; in how they are so easily marginalised in public debate; and, indeed, in how little real engagement they have with public debate.

I give a more comprehensive summary of the research findings at the beginning of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The approach adopted in this study

This study emerged from a lifetime of working with teachers. I had come to believe that a chasm existed between the concerns articulated in national education debate and the reality of the classroom as experienced by teachers. Thus, I sought to explore the nature of teaching and education in second-level schools through the experiences of experienced teachers, and to identify if an alternative muted discourse exists within the profession.

National debate on education in Ireland is dominated by the human capital agenda, and takes as its starting point the outputs from the system, deciding what is desirable and then making recommendations as to how to intervene in the system in order to achieve these outcomes. The same is true of national policy initiatives (Gleeson, 2009). They work from the outside in, and make recommendations about the *process* of education based on “desirable” *outcomes*. In this approach, questions of pedagogy are given little consideration. What happens in schools and classrooms is viewed as merely the context and the means for producing the *outcomes* of education. This approach misses the point that the *process* is, in fact, part of the product, part of education itself.

This study, on the other hand, begins by exploring the *process* as experienced by teachers. It seeks to find out what actually happens in the classroom and staffroom, and it then explores why things happen in these ways. So, it begins on the inside. From the perspectives gleaned by this approach, it throws new light on the nature of second-level education in school settings, on teachers’ motivations and how they view their work, and on why interventions based on an “outside in” approach have often failed to produce the desired outcomes. It shows that, for teachers, *process* is very important, and that this process revolves around their relationships with their students.

Summary of findings

Two primary, linked findings emerge from the study. Firstly, that teaching takes place within a complex web of authentic relationships, and that these form not only the context within which learning takes place, but are, in fact, an important part of the learning itself. And, secondly, the requirement of authenticity in these relationships means that the selfhood of the teacher is centrally employed in the job of teaching; the teacher must commit personally as well as professionally to the job. In a further finding, the study highlights how the absence of a language among teachers in which to articulate their tacit knowledge contributes to privatism and isolation in their work, and suggests that this may also explain why teachers are often so unconvincing in public debate.

These findings offer new perspectives on some of the persistent characteristics of second-level schools in Ireland; characteristics such as privatism in teaching, the absence of collegiality in many schools, the resistance of schools to fundamental cultural change, and the inability of teachers and their representatives to present and defend their work publicly in credible manner.

Teaching as relationship, and the selfhood of the teacher

Teachers create and work within a complex web of relationships. These relationships are crucial to the quality of the education that the student receives; students will learn from teachers they like and trust. And the web of relationships within which learning takes place is extensive; relationships between teacher and class, between teacher and individual students, between students themselves within the classroom, and relationships between teacher and individuals and groups of students outside the classroom. Such relationships are intensive, important and of long duration (lasting for at least an academic year). This study has shown teachers *nurturing* their relationships with students and, in turn, receiving satisfaction and fulfilment from authentic relationships with them. It shows that teaching as experienced by them differs from other occupations in the range, complexity and significance of the relationships which teachers must establish, and in the extent to which they must nurture these relationships. Furthermore, these relationships not only provide the context within which teaching and learning take place; they are an essential part of children's learning experience, and they have a big influence on the personal wellbeing of students and teachers alike. Hence, to a significant extent, the ability to teach is bound up with the ability to form and sustain relationships with individuals

and groups, to provide nurture, and to intervene appropriately and mediate relationships between individuals and groups of students. And this ability depends on the selfhood of the teacher. Thus, the selfhood of the teacher is a resource, maybe his or her main resource in the job of teaching (Moskvina, 2006). While there are, of course, interpersonal skills which can be learned and guidelines and boundaries to relationships which can be prescribed, ultimately authentic relationships depend on the selfhoods of those involved; they involve a sharing of selves in a very real sense. This is as true in relationships between teachers and students as it is between parents and children. Thus, while it may be possible to be a good doctor, accountant, or lawyer without forming good relationships with patients or clients, this study suggests that one cannot be a good teacher without establishing, nurturing and mediating a complex set of authentic relationships with students.

The participants in this study describe finding themselves in positions where they have to exercise discretionary judgement over issues of care and curriculum that affect their students, and of balancing competing demands of the system and society with the needs of their students. This exercise of discretionary judgement means that they must engage in a dialogue between their own values and the moral and social purposes of education. Allied to the centrality of selfhood in their work, this means that teachers will always have to be self-reliant, and that teaching will always involve struggle; findings which have emerged in the research. The requirement of self-reliance may, paradoxically, have contributed to privatism in teaching when, in fact, it increases the necessity for teachers to work in supportive, collegial environments. Their struggle is to remain true to fundamental values, to resolve tensions between competing demands, and to retain authenticity in relationships with self, students, parents and colleagues. The investment of the self in teaching relationships means that their careers are intimately intertwined with their lives, as is evident from the accounts of participants. Lives have phases, and so do teachers' careers. Their careers grow or decline, progress or regress in parallel with their physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual wellbeing. And, because the job involves the very self of the teacher, their work influences their life growth, just as their life situation affects their teaching. This has significant implications for the types of support and the personal and professional development which teachers require.

Thus, the central finding of this thesis is that relationships are central to teaching in a very unique way; and consequently, that the selfhood of the teacher is a necessary and vital ingredient in education, something to be cherished and supported and, not, as Palmer (2007) suggests is often the case, a danger to be avoided. This finding is

one of immense significance for our education system; for teachers, for students, for the quality of education, for education policy makers and managers and ultimately for our society as a whole.

A language to describe teaching

Participants' accounts have shown that they have reflected deeply, and have deep understandings of teaching and learning, and of the centrality of relationship and of their own selfhood in their work. However, they have also shown that in many cases this knowledge is tacit and unarticulated (though none-the-less valid in consequence, (Atkinson & Claxton, 2000)). In a very real sense, trying to articulate tacit knowledge brought my participants and I into using a language with which we were not familiar. Conversations about the roles played by emotions, care, love, joy, struggles, motivations, vulnerabilities, and the interlinking of our personal and professional lives in our work were tentative, particularly in early interviews; words did not come easily. However, the iterative methodology used in the research allowed explanations and descriptions of practice to be interpreted from participants' stories and in turn to be scrutinised and refined by them. In this process, aspects of tacit knowledge came to be articulated. By the latter stages of this study, we came to realise that this articulation involved us in using language not familiar to us from staffrooms, from policy documents or from public debate on education in Ireland, a fact remarked on by three participants. In this realisation lies a very important, emerging finding from the study; that teachers do not commonly use, perhaps do not have the language needed to fully describe their practice.

This is, perhaps, not surprising when one considers the neo-liberal assumptions which underpin our education system and the language in which these are expressed with its emphasis on measurable outputs and the technicalities of the system. Such language seems incapable of comprehending or coming to terms with the fact that a personal, emotional commitment by both teachers and students lies at the heart of our schools, and responds by ignoring, ridiculing or marginalising such ideas. This is evident, for example, in the lack of priority accorded to pedagogy in comparison with issues of control, curriculum content, examination results or other technical issues in educational policy making and educational debate in Ireland (Gleeson, 2009). Thus the language of emotion, struggle and relationship is fine for poets and novelists, but finds no place in official documents on education. Such language is dismissed as lacking in precision, rigour and certainty. But this is the language that my participants my participants and I discovered that we needed to conceptualise and

describe our practice in the process of this study. It is the also language necessary for teachers to make their voice credible in the education debate.

Thus, this study suggests that the teaching profession must reclaim the language in which the education debate is conducted. To do this, they must learn how to discuss *all* aspects of their practice and share their understandings, firstly among themselves and then in public debate.

Implications of the findings

Privatism

The study found that privatism is prevalent among teachers in Irish second-level schools (p. 114), a fact well documented in the literature. Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis give graphic examples of isolation and loneliness, lack of collegial support, lack of professional trust, taboo subjects in the staffroom, and absence of discussion of important issues such as relationships, vulnerabilities and emotions. However, the findings of this study offer some new insights into why privatism persists, despite efforts (as for example, in the Leaving Certificate Applied and Vocational programmes) to encourage collegiality.

The fact that teachers must invest so much of themselves in their work leaves them sensitive to criticism; if there is criticism, it is not just of their work, but of themselves (Nias, 1996; Palmer, 2007). In addition, in their work with students, they are constantly called on to make instant, contingent decisions (in which tone and manner of communication are important as well as content or action). For these decisions, there is no manual; teachers can only draw on their *personal practical knowledge*, their values, their very selfhood. Discussion of any such decision might require considerable time which is not readily available in busy schools. It would also require developing considerable trust in one's colleagues in order to open one's soul in such a manner. It is easier, and superficially safer, not to take such risks. The fact that teachers do not have the language in which to explain and describe their motivations and practice may be a by-product of privatism, but is also a contributor to it.

Hargreaves (2000: 162) lists the effects of individualism, isolation and privatism as including lack of confidence because of absence of feedback, impaired improvement as a teacher, limited sense of self belief, focus on short-term improvement, proneness

to guilt and depression, and lack of professional dialogue – an ironic outcome being that most teachers ended up teaching the same dull way! Trust is another casualty; the absence of professional trust in staffrooms was very evident from the study. All of these negative effects have been experienced by my participants during their careers, and are described in their accounts.

In the cultural and political context, investment in Irish second-level education is legitimated in large measure by the human capital paradigm where education is seen as investment in people for economic gain in much the same way as one might view investment in plant or new technology (p. 22). From such a standpoint, measurement of inputs and outputs and prescribing curriculum content and learning objectives, and judging teachers' work by examination results follow. To teachers, these discourses portray a world of measurement, clarity, results. It is a long way from the world of the classroom; a tentative world of relationships, of contingency, of struggle, of balance, of doing one's best, of context, of emotion. By implication and omission, the teachers' world and their daily classroom experience are topics deemed not worthy of serious consideration. By elevating the importance of the outputs (even as distinct from the longer term outcomes) of the education system above the process of education, the work of teachers is demeaned and ignored. This is evident in participants' accounts in what appear at times to be almost furtive attempts to bring their own values into their work. Is it any wonder that these issues are not openly discussed when, to admit publicly to vulnerability or struggle, as many of my participants did, would risk being classified as unfit for the job?

Yet, my participants' accounts suggest that the job of teaching involves coming to know and trust one's selfhood, and making it available and vulnerable in the service of learning (Palmer, 2007). Indeed, coming to terms with one's vulnerability can be a big strength as a teacher. McCormack (2009) has described a situation where acknowledging his vulnerability as a teacher created a new dynamic between teacher and students which opened new learning opportunities for both. While he was working in an adult education setting, my participants' accounts, too, demonstrate their taking risks in the service of learning (e.g., Linda and Conor using humour, Cathy in making herself available to chat with students in her free time, Ben in sharing his growth with his students, Robert in carrying out his disciplinary role). They also demonstrate a keen awareness and respect for the vulnerability of their students. Indeed, acknowledging and respecting vulnerability heightens the receptiveness to learning; ignoring it gives free rein to fears, and leads to privatism (for both teacher and student).

Thus, this study suggests that the issue of privatism is at least partly a response to the lack of recognition accorded to vulnerability in teaching and, in turn, privatism contributes further to teachers' isolation and vulnerability. This can only be addressed, and collegial cultures developed in school staffrooms when the centrality of relationships and of the selfhood of the teacher in education, and the implications of this, are acknowledged and valued by teachers themselves, by the other partners in education and by society generally.

Education and schooling

Participants' accounts highlight the fact that schooling and education do not mean the same thing. Education in the school setting will always be shaped by the cultural and political landscape of the day. Schools are not purely educational establishments. Apart from education, society also requires schools to serve other, sometimes competing social and economic agendas; agendas such as transmission of values, socialisation of children, provision of a skilled workforce, promotion of equality in society. These may not be uneducational *per se* but, as participants' accounts demonstrate, they do skew what happens in the classroom, emphasising some aspects of education and suppressing others. In education debate and policy making in Ireland, educational agendas must vie for recognition with these other demands; and, often, education struggles to be heard. Participants describe working within systems which seem to serve agendas other than the student's needs; discipline systems, increasing bureaucracy and demands on non-teaching time, demands for accountability, overloaded curricula, emphasis on results. Indeed, it appears that teachers must look for cracks in the system for opportunities to put their educational values into practice; examples such as Cathy finding opportunities to talk with students in the school yard or going down town, Linda sitting beside a weaker student, Ben's retreats, Conor using humour as a means of inclusion, Robert in extra-curricular activities. These all represent personal and professional investments by teachers in students' education, sometimes done in an almost furtive manner, and rarely receiving overt acknowledgment or appreciation in national debate or in official policy.

Thus, this study suggests that what is often called the *education* debate in Ireland should, perhaps, be better called the *schooling* debate. This would make it clearer that education is but one of the interests represented in the debate and thus would allow educational issues to be examined separately from the other interests involved. And, it is important that the authentic voice of classroom teachers be heard in advocacy for these educational issues.

The teachers' voice in the schooling debate

In some respects, teachers in Ireland have a very strong voice in educational policy making. But, as Gleeson (2004) and Granville (2004) have shown, the voice is that of the teacher unions, and the agenda is not always educational. One result of this is that educational issues become misdirected into industrial relations debates. In the schooling debate in the media, their voice is not strong. Teachers' contributions are frequently derided, and teachers themselves repositioned as *the problem* (O Sullivan, 2005). This is possible because the debate takes place within a neo-liberal framework using the language of the market place within which the affective aspects of education cannot be valued.

There is an urgent need for the authentic voice of teachers to be heard. Nobody else has such insight or interest in ensuring that the education agenda is heard in the schooling debate. But this study has shown that teachers have not developed the language in which to articulate their voice. Until they are able to describe what is really important in classroom life, their contributions to public debate will continue to be ineffective, and the schooling debate will continue to be dominated by other agendas.

Why are schools different?

Managerial discourses claim that efficient management can solve any problem, and that practices which are appropriate for the conduct of private sector enterprises can also be applied to the public sector (Sachs, 2003). Participants' accounts, and the literature, give evidence, however, that this is not the case; that such practices place barriers between teachers and students, and do nothing to promote trust in the staffroom. To defend against such practices, the teaching profession must find an answer to the question: "why are schools different?" This study suggests that schools are different because managing schools is essentially about managing relationships; not just good relationships as a means of improving efficiency, but relationships as part of a holistic education, as part of the actual product of the organisation. While businesses in the services industry frequently boast of good service from their staff "as part of their product", this is motivated by the self-interest of retaining customers or clients and increasing sales. In schools, it is an ethical obligation on the part of all staff towards their students.

Implementing change in schools

Gleeson (2004:105) observes that despite a lot of effort and much apparent change and reform over the previous fifteen years, “little has changed in the culture of our schools”. Goodson (2004: 32) states that much externally mandated change has failed to *sustain* new reforms; the old ways re-assert themselves in time. He argues that “the key lacuna in externally mandated change is the link to teachers’ professional beliefs and to teachers’ own personal missions”. As a result, progressive teachers, instead of being progressive agents of change often find themselves in the position of reacting against externally imposed change which is not in line with their own values and which they see as unwelcome and hostile. He adds that good teachers are intrinsically motivated; they continue doing their job and exercising their moral responsibility to their students as they perceive it, often in spite of, rather than because of, external demands.

This intrinsic motivation is very evident in the accounts of my participants. All made considerable efforts to meet their students needs and to care for them, even though “secondary schools offer few material or status rewards to ‘caring’ staff” (Nias 1996: 4). Morgan *et al.* (2010: 12) say that “reforms that keep a clear focus on the existing intrinsic motivation of teachers, particularly around students’ engagement and learning may provide an impetus to teachers’ motivation”.

Eisner (1992) identified nine factors which make schools resistant to change¹⁹. He adds that “the place to begin school reform is in the effort to understand the ways schools actually function” (p. 619).

So, if change is to be successfully introduced into schools, the initiative must link with teachers’ own professional beliefs and personal missions. It must acknowledge, respect and engage with the selfhood of the teacher. As Palmer (2007: 4) notes:

In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher on whom so much depends.

¹⁹ These include the images of teaching which new teachers bring from their own schooldays, the fact that efforts at reform are usually added on to demanding teachers’ schedules, that the language of change frequently undermines genuine change, privatisation, inadequacies of in-service education, the often traditional expectation of parents and students, the absence of a teachers’ voice in policy formation, the division of curricula into subject matters, and piecemeal efforts at reform.

Towards an understanding of teacher professionalism

The term “teacher” is a social construct, just as adulthood is (Rogers, 2003: 51). The Teaching Council is constructing the “teacher” in particular ways which will have implications for their status, for what they do and for how they do it, for how they will see themselves and how others will see them, and ultimately for the nature and quality of their work and of the education that their students will receive. Nowhere will this be more important than in the debate on professionalism. In its “Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers”, published in 2007, the Council articulates a set of “core values” which “underpin the work of the teaching profession in Ireland” (p. 15). These are “expressed *positively* in terms of core principles and commitments” (p. 9, my emphasis) and this positive language pervades the document. For example, the value ‘Quality of Education’ (p. 18) is elaborated as follows:

Teachers promote and maintain the highest quality of educational experiences for their students. Teachers facilitate student progression in their learning and development and their effective engagement with the curriculum.

Using this description, I have failed on many an occasion as a teacher, and continue to fail.

The following is how the core value ‘Collegiality’ is elaborated:

Teachers work in collegiality with colleagues in the interests of sharing, promoting, developing and supporting best professional practice.

This is presented as a statement of fact, in spite of evidence that levels of professional collaboration among teachers in Ireland are low compared with other countries (OECD, 2009). It is also contradicted by the findings of this study.

My concern with the use of this language is that it represents good practice as easily definable and unproblematic. It does not recognise or engage with the centrality of struggle and vulnerability in teachers’ experience, nor does it suggest an engagement with teachers’ own professional beliefs and personal missions. In contrast, Goodson and Hargreaves (1996: 20-21) use a different, less dogmatic language in suggesting principles on which a new understanding of teacher professionalism can be constructed. For example, their principle in relation to collegiality is described as follows:

... a commitment to working with colleagues in collaborative cultures of help and support as a way of using shared expertise to solve the ongoing problems of professional practice.

Such aspirational language is more likely to connect with teachers' experiences of the classroom, with their own personal missions and professional values, and to inspire their practice and to sustain their commitment.

Towards a debate on professionalism

I believe one of the most challenging and important tasks facing the Teaching Council and the teaching profession is to generate a widespread national debate *among teachers* on the issue of professionalism. The aim of such a debate should be to articulate understandings of professionalism which recognise and value the affective as well as the instrumental aspects of teachers' work, and the centrality of their own selfhood in the education that they provide; understandings that will nourish them as teachers and persons, sustain their careers, and enhance the quality of life in the classroom for both teacher and students. I hope that this thesis contributes to this debate in a significant way.

Reflection on the methodology

The iterative methodology used in the research was a modified form of narrative inquiry, but it also drew from of action research and constructivist grounded theory. It was designed for this study in order to allow my participants to articulate their personal practical knowledge and to allow me, together with them, to interpret their meanings and present their accounts, being true to their nuanced complexity. It was also chosen as being pragmatic given the constraints of time and of my own expertise as a researcher (p. 44).

I believe that the methodology worked very well and produced very rich accounts of these teachers' experiences. The fact that much of the richness emerged from second and subsequent interviews and conversations with participants justifies the iterative approach. Their active participation in the analysis of the data and the construction of their accounts adds to the authenticity of the findings. It also enabled the co-construction of knowledge between us; in fact, some participants became active co-researchers with me in the study. Three of them spoke of how the process was a valuable learning experience for them. These were all things I had hoped that the methodology would facilitate.

The findings themselves were significantly determined by the methodology. The iterative and narrative approaches allowed the discovery and construction of nuanced meanings from participants accounts. Furthermore, the methodology influenced the manner in which the thesis is presented. The structures of chapters 4 and 5 are designed to first of all present participants' personal practical knowledge and then to interrogate it and interpret meanings in a thematic way. I am pleased to have been able to present participants' accounts as faithfully in this thesis as has been done in Chapter 4. I believe and hope that it gives voice to my participants' experiences in a rare and authentic manner.

A significant reflection on the iterative methodology is that it was developed, at least in part, because of my awareness of the limits of my abilities and experience as an interviewer. And I believe that its success in enabling participants to be open and to engage so actively in the research provides an example of where acknowledgement of one's limits and vulnerabilities can create a framework which facilitates openness and learning. I believe this to be true for researchers and as well as for teachers.

Finally, I very strongly believe that an important finding of this research is the suitability of the methodology used for the purpose of studying teachers' experiences, and perhaps also its possibilities for use in teacher professional development.

My own engagement with the research

Development of the research

My two research questions at the beginning of this study related to the involvement of the personality of the teacher in the work of teaching, and whether new understandings of professionalism could inspire and nourish teachers' careers and lives. The first question led early on into an exploration of teaching as relationship, and the importance of the selfhood of the teacher in the work in establishing and sustaining a complex web of authentic relationships. The requirement of authenticity in relationships then led, in turn to an exploration of the central role of the selfhood of the teacher in the work of teaching.

The concept of professionalism, however, did not resonate strongly with most of my participants. Even though their accounts of their teaching contain many examples of professional practice, they had not, with one exception, thought in depth about professionalism or the implications of different models of professionalism for their

practice. In similar manner, I found that in many instances their deep understandings and knowledge of their work is tacit and unarticulated. Thus, as I have described (p. 146), the issue of language emerged as an important issue in the research. In a sense this is linked to professionalism, because articulation of the meaning of concepts such as professionalism presupposes a dialogue among colleagues about their practice; and this presupposes comfort with a language which will facilitate such dialogue.

Because it was in the latter stages of the study that language emerged as an issue, it has not been researched as thoroughly as necessary. This is an area where further study could profitably be undertaken.

My own learning

Early on, in discussion with participants, I realised that one of my main motivations in undertaking this study was to make sense of my own career. This became a key motivator throughout the research; if I could find answers to the big questions of my own career, the findings would at least be authentic, and might be of interest to others. This helped shape my methodology; in a very real sense I realised I was researching myself and my career as well as the subject matter of the study. This involved me in a lot of critical self-reflection which was difficult and, at times, painful, but was necessary if I were to make sense of my own career; after all, I could not hope to make sense of my participant's stories if I were unable to make sense of my own.

An early question that emerged for me in the research was "what makes teaching different?" Why do so many ideas for management, productivity or effectiveness seem not to fit in the school setting? Why do so many ideas about professionalism not seem to fit teaching? Why do teachers often appear to be conservative, even reactionary when they try to defend their practice in public fora? Why did teachers' arguments, and my own, against some of the trends in teaching seem unconvincing, even to my own ears? Because I had invested so much personally and professionally in my career these questions were personal; they hurt. This study has answered some of these questions for me, and has placed others in a wider context which makes them easier to manage (though not necessarily to solve!). It has also helped me to find a language to discuss issues which had previously caused me frustration, but which I was unable to articulate or defend. And I have found in a number of fora that my

findings have resonated with teachers²⁰. I hope that I will in future be able to bring my practice more into congruence with my values, that I will continue to develop the language to describe teaching in the fullness of what it entails, and I hope that I can contribute to the development of teachers and the teaching profession by bringing these findings to the national debate.

The research has also helped me to make some sense of my career; to see it as a journey or pilgrimage; to find a language to express my feelings and ideas, indeed to find reassurance that these feelings, values and ideals relating to my work are normal, acceptable and even positive. I now find it legitimate to say, as Nias (1996: 3) does, that I 'feel' my teaching as well as 'thinking it'; I am not just a 'talking head'.

Suggestions for further research

Recognising the centrality of rapport and of the selfhood of the teacher in the process of teaching raises issues not answered in this study. Firstly, it raises the question of the type of personal and professional supports necessary for teachers. Supervision, as is made available to counsellors, is one type of support which seems appropriate to make available to teachers in some circumstances. How this would work is beyond the scope of this thesis, but is worthy of further study. While the Employee Assistance Scheme of the Department of Education and Science is a welcome innovation, how to develop more local support through supportive, collegial working environments in school staffrooms, supported by a some form of routine supervision is a different challenge and worthy of research.

The small number of participants in the research, and their similarity in age suggest that the findings should be investigated with other groups of teachers. However, I believe that the temptation to carry out large-scale questionnaire-type research should be avoided; the richness and nuances of teachers' careers will not be captured in such research. I believe that a narrative-type research methodology has the potential to find deep meaning. And, not only can it provide rich data; my study shows that it can also be developmental for participants themselves.

²⁰ Findings presented to education management course for teachers in the region. Also, selected findings presented to principals and senior managers of the VEC., as well as at the ESAI conferences of 2009 and 2010.

Issues relating to language grew in importance throughout the study. It became clear that an inadequacy of language to describe their practice has serious implications for teachers in their work, and also in their ability to represent themselves in public. How to address this is a major challenge, and one worthy of further study.

Finally, the question of how to engage teachers in discussions about wider issues that concern them is a major challenge; this is one that particularly faces the Teaching Council as it continues to develop its work. Why this does not happen easily, and how it can be achieved would provide questions for a major study. A related topic is how to ensure that teachers' personal practical knowledge is recognised, and informs public debate and policy-making in education.

Finally

This thesis is partial. It is not the full story. But it does highlight relationships and the selfhood of the teacher as central elements of teaching which have been undervalued and under-represented in public debate and whose absence from that debate has enabled a distorted view of schooling and education to take root in Ireland. I acknowledge also that the dominant discourses have merit; it is not my task to highlight this. What is needed is a balanced debate which acknowledges the importance of *all* aspects of education, thus providing our second-level students with a better educational experience. I hope that this research will contribute to such an outcome.

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