

**VETERAN TEACHER VOICES: RELATIONAL
ACCOUNTABILITY AND ETHICAL PROFESSIONALISM IN
SECOND-LEVEL EDUCATION IN IRELAND**

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland
CEB	Curriculum and Examinations Board (later the NCCA)
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DES	Department of Education and Skills
EEC	European Economic Community
EEPS	European Education Policy Space
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
FEMPI	Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Act 2009)
H.Dip	Higher Diploma in Education
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGDE	Postgraduate Diploma in Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PME	Professional Master of Education
SLSS	Second-Level Support Services
SSE	School Self-Evaluation
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
TUI	Teachers' Union of Ireland
UNESCO	United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation
VEC	Vocational Education Committee (later the ETB)
WSE	Whole School Evaluation

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For Oliver, who believed in me when I didn't.

For Padraic, who helped me find my voice.

Summary

Teacher professionalism has become an increasingly contested and ambiguous concept in international and national educational discourses. Policy rhetoric ostensibly aimed at increasing teacher professionalism is critiqued as in fact eroding some of its core tenets (Sachs 2016; Biesta 2015a; 2015b; Ball 2003; Hargreaves 2000). This dissertation develops a model of ethical professionalism through which teacher professionalism might be reframed so as to challenge what has been termed the deprofessionalisation of teaching. The study is located against the backdrop of accelerating change in the context of second-level education in the Republic of Ireland. Through a theoretical framework based on the work of the philosophers Adriana Cavarero (2000) and Judith Butler (2012; 2010; 2004), the study examines the teacher identity narratives of eight second-level teachers who each have more than 20 years' experience. A methodology is developed which uses the ethics of recognition as a guiding concept in a narrative analysis of the lives and experiences of the participant teachers. The study makes a contribution to the national literature in the Irish context by offering a deeper understanding of the nuances and complexities of change resistance in the second-level context and by drawing attention to the teacher voices of experienced or veteran teachers, an under-researched group in the Irish context. Building on the key issues that emerged from the teacher identity narratives, the study unpacks the operation of concepts such as autonomy, accountability, power, agency, and relationality within teacher identity. By placing this analysis within the international theoretical and empirical literature, a model of teacher professionalism is developed that is rooted in an ethical educational relation. This model of ethical teacher professionalism is developed with a particular eye to the political aspect of teacher identity and the potential of such a model to challenge the dominance of external narratives of deprofessionalisation. The study makes a contribution to the international literature on teacher professionalism by suggesting a reframed model of ethical teacher professionalism which could complement and enhance existing models by drawing the Arendtian concept of the political space of action into the core of teacher professionalism.

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

1. Context and Rationale

Until relatively recently, the teaching profession in Ireland had enjoyed a high social status and had to a large part escaped the discourses that in other contexts have positioned the profession as a policy problem or, indeed, have questioned its very status as a profession. However, the profession's status has begun to shift towards an ambiguous position in the past two decades (Mooney Simmie *et al.* 2016; Gleeson 2010; Hogan 2003; Coolahan 2003). In recent years, this shift has accelerated and a changing perception of the profession has come to the fore in media and public debates around a number of issues. A proposed reform of the curriculum at junior post-primary level led to a prolonged dispute from 2011 onwards, culminating in strike action by the post-primary teacher unions in 2016. This dispute took place against a backdrop of changes to working conditions and decreases in salaries across the public sector resulting from the 2008 global recession in which Ireland's open economy was particularly vulnerable. For the teaching profession as well as for other public sector workers, these budgetary measures included a change to salary scales, increased taxation, reduced pension entitlements, and the introduction of additional working hours. A further element of tension in this fraught context was the perception of a crisis in teaching standards arising from a sudden drop in Ireland's ranking in the PISA 2009 survey of educational attainment (OECD 2010). All of these factors, together with the international educational discourses termed the global education reform movement, contributed to what has been described by Conway and Murphy (2013) as a 'perfect storm' for the teaching profession in the Irish context.

The origins of this study are located within this period, during which the researcher was working as a second-level teacher. The study was prompted by an emerging sense of a mismatch between the rhetoric of the various stakeholders involved in the debates, including teacher representatives, and the reality of the lived experience of teachers in the Irish context (Mooney Simmie 2016; Jeffers & Dempsey 2015). As

the profession's resistance to the second-level curriculum reform and other policy changes moved towards strike action, it became clear that this was not just about individual teachers unwilling to change but about a deeper discontent and malaise within the profession. The roots of this discontent lie far before the current moment and extend beyond the issues that triggered this particular industrial dispute. Thus, any attempt to understand the present policy moment must place the reform resistance firmly within its historical and cultural context and within the context of teachers' interpretations of their lived experience.

This dissertation adopts a narrative approach, drawing on the narratives of 8 veteran second-level teachers with over 20 years of experience in teaching, thus illustrating the complex interweaving of the micro individual lived experience with the macro national and international education policy context to better understand the development of teacher identity in the Irish context. The central research question that emerges from the analysis of these narratives asks how teacher professionalism might be reframed through an ethical model of professionalism and what this reframed model might look like in practice. Through addressing this research question, the dissertation aims to contribute to the national and international literature on teacher professionalism, an increasingly contested and ambiguous concept in contemporary education discourse.

The national context of the 'perfect storm' outlined above is inescapably part of a wider context in which international discourses around education and teaching are increasingly powerful in shaping national discourses (Grek *et al.* 2013; Lingard 2013a; 2013b; Ozga 2013; 2012; Lingard & Rawolle 2011; Grek *et al.* 2009). These international discourses include: an emphasis on teacher professionalism as key to improving educational outcomes; a related focus on teacher evaluation and accountability mechanisms; a turn to standardisation of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; and a growth in the competitive individualism that has been associated with neoliberalism (Sachs 2016; 2001; Fullan *et al.* 2015; Hargreaves 2005; 2000; Ball 2003). Against such a global backdrop, the concept of teacher identity becomes not only "an individual or social process but also a deeply political process" (Zembylas and Chubbuck 2014, p.174). National education policies framed through a global knowledge economy lens emphasise the importance of teacher professionalism to educational, and thus economic, success. Critical analyses of such policies, however, suggest that they contribute to the deprofessionalisation of teaching (Biesta 2015a; 2011b; Ball 2003;

Apple 1996). In an era of these increasingly pervasive deprofessionalisation discourses, the necessity of placing the political at the core of teacher identity is a concern that must shape the approach to educational research and to teacher education. The dominance and strength of politically rooted external narratives *about* the profession can only be negotiated or resisted through equally politically conscious internal narratives *of* the profession, of being used here in the sense of ownership and origin.

Thus, the contemporary moment in the context of Irish post-primary education, shaped as it is by both national and international debates around the teaching profession, is a moment that challenges the very notion of what it is to be a teacher. The debates and disputes in the national context have raised nuances and particularities in the interpretation of teacher identity in the Irish context that are not simply echoes of international interpretations but merit a culturally and historically contextualised exploration (Jeffers & Dempsey 2015; Conway 2013; Kitching 2010; Sugrue 2009; 2004). At the same time, international discourses and policy trends place the teaching profession in an ever more ontologically insecure position (Thompson & Cook 2014). This position of insecurity calls for a reappraisal and renewal of the profession's core values in order to negotiate the dominance of the external narratives about the profession. This challenging moment, precisely *because* it calls so much into question about teaching, can thus be seen as an opportunity to learn more about what it is that teachers themselves perceive to be the core elements of teacher identity. Following Santoro, I take the position that "periods of professional crisis can be opportunities to learn more about what practitioners believe are the inviolable aspects of their craft" (2017, p.743). In the face of multiple external narratives about teaching, I turn to the teacher identity narratives of second-level teachers in the Irish context to learn about their interpretations and perceptions of their professional identity and the educational contexts in which they teach.

2. Guiding Concepts and Theoretical Commitments

The research is located at the intersection of three fields of educational research literature. It draws from the sociological field in terms of teacher identity research and education policy studies, from the historical field in terms of the historical narrative of

the Irish education policy context, and from the philosophical field in terms of its theoretical commitments and approach to the analysis of the research interviews. The international literature on teacher identity informs the approach that is taken to understanding that concept (Sachs 2016; Santoro 2013; 2011; Day *et al.* 2005; Day 2002; Sachs 2001; Hargreaves 2000; Huberman 1993) while the literature on teacher identity in the Irish context contextualises and complements the identity narratives of the research participants (O’Flaherty & Gleeson 2017; 2014; Furlong 2012; Lynch *et al.* 2013; Hall *et al.* 2012; Kitching 2009; Kitching *et al.* 2009; Sugrue 1997). The international literature in the field of education policy studies, and particularly the analytic work in the area of policy sociology, inform the study’s understanding of the themes and issues that shape contemporary education contexts (Lingard 2013a; 2013b; Lingard & Rawolle 2011; Ozga 2013; 2012; Grek *et al.* 2012; Ball 1994). Education policy studies in the Irish context are also significant in terms of informing the study’s understanding of the historical narrative of the Irish education context (Gleeson 2010; O’Sullivan 2005; Ó Buachalla 1988; Lynch 1987; Mulcahy 1981).

The study locates itself within the literature that brings these fields together to examine themes such as policy enactment at school-level, the interplay of education change and teacher identity, and the relationship between international policy discourse and teacher identity (Biesta *et al.* 2015; Maguire *et al.* 2014; Biesta 2013; Imants *et al.* 2013; Braun *et al.* 2011a; Day *et al.* 2006; Hargreaves 2005; Lasky 2005; Van Veen & Lasky 2005; Fullan 2000). From within these literatures, the key concept that emerged to guide the study’s investigation of teacher identity was the notion of teacher professionalism. This is a concept that is nuanced and complex and that can, depending on its interpretation and operation, play an ambiguous role within teacher identity.

These fields within the educational research literature inform the study’s conceptual and contextual framework. The study’s approach is also informed by a number of theoretical commitments that are rooted within the feminist philosophical tradition. These include a commitment to complexity, openness, and voice. These concepts are central to the design of the study’s methodology. In adopting a theoretical framework that centres these commitments, the study draws on the work of the philosophers Adriana Cavarero (2000) and Judith Butler (2012; 2010; 2004; 2001). Cavarero’s theory of the narratable self and her work around uniqueness, interdependency, and voice is brought into conversation with Butler’s work on

vulnerability and recognition to form the foundation of the study's theoretical framework. The combination of this theoretical framework and the methodological commitment to openness and complexity allows for a nuanced investigation of teacher identity that brings the individual to the fore. Importantly however, the nuance provided for within the work of both Cavarero and Butler means that the individual, while celebrated, is not atomised. In other words, it is not individualism that is centred but rather an individuality that is rooted in relationality and interdependency.

Narrative is a guiding concept within the research, where it is understood to operate at two levels. The first is at the individual level as a sense-making process that brings coherence to one's interpretation of the self, an understanding that draws on Cavarero's work on the narratable self (2000). The other interpretation of narrative used within the research operates at the cultural or societal level and involves the assumptions or stories that inform our interpretations of, for example, education or teaching. The interpretation of narrative used to guide this study understands these two levels as operating in dynamic interaction with each other in the construction of teacher identity. This interpretation is informed by Clandinin and Connelly's work on narrative in teacher identity, particularly around the interplay of "teacher stories" and "stories of teaching", where the individual and the contextual interact in the production of teachers' "professional knowledge landscape" (1996).

3. Research Aims, Questions, and Contributions

This study explores the concept of teacher professionalism through an analysis of the teacher identity narratives of eight second-level teachers in the Irish context, each of whom have over 20 years' experience. The core aim of the study is to develop a model for the reframing of teacher professionalism through a lens of ethical professionalism. This aim arose from the review of the literature and the emergent findings of the analysis, both of which pointed to the need to develop a model of teacher professionalism which challenges the deprofessionalisation of teachers that is a feature of contemporary education discourse. As outlined in the discussion of the research context and rationale, the study originated from a need to understand the background to a particular policy moment in the Irish context, namely the teaching profession's

resistance to a curricular reform at junior post-primary level. It quickly became apparent that, in order to understand this resistance, it would be necessary to take a broader view by investigating teachers' interpretations and perceptions of their professional identities and placing those interpretations within the context of education policy and change in Ireland. This investigation led to the development of the central research aim and questions, which explore the concept of teacher professionalism.

Thus, the aims of the research in terms of the national context are: a) to develop a deeper understanding of teacher identity in the context of Irish second-level education; b) to explore the relationship between education change and teacher identity in that context; and c) to examine the operation of international educational discourses in the context of teacher identity in Ireland. Following the initial literature review, a specific gap was identified in the literature on teacher identity in the Irish context. This gap concerned the voices of veteran or experienced second-level teachers. The existing literature on teacher identity focuses overwhelmingly, although not exclusively, on student and newly qualified teachers. Furthermore, while there are significant exceptions, the literature that exists on experienced teachers in the second-level sector tends to position specific curricular or policy questions as the research focus. This means that the research hones in on a particular moment in the teacher's career rather than looking at their teacher identity more holistically over the course of their career. Thus, in response to this gap, the first research aim was refined to indicate that the study aimed to understand the teacher identity of *experienced* teachers in the context of Irish second-level education, with experienced meaning that the teachers had taught for more than 20 years.

Given the theoretical commitments indicated above, the study's research questions were broad initially and were refined on an ongoing basis as the research progressed through a reiterative cycle of literature reviewing, fieldwork, and analysis. This allowed the research participants' perceptions of teacher identity to guide the study in a manner which remained true to the theoretical commitments that were made to openness and voice. The research questions were: a) how does teacher identity operate in the biographic narratives of experienced second-level teachers in the Irish context?; b) what is the relationship between education change and teacher identity in the context of second-level education in Ireland?; and c) what are some key issues in terms of the teacher identity of second-level teachers in the current Irish context?

Following the early stages of the fieldwork and analysis, a further two research questions were added to the three indicated above. The fourth and fifth research questions are: how could teacher professionalism be reimagined as ethical professionalism?; and what might an ethical teacher professionalism look like in practice? These questions have a more international focus than the first three in that they address the concept of teacher professionalism in the context of the international empirical and theoretical literature, adopting the lens of the study's theoretical framework in order to develop a model for the reframing of the concept.

As indicated above, a significant gap in the literature which the study addresses is the lack of research on the teacher identity of experienced second-level teacher identity in the Irish context. While the teacher identity of student, emerging, and newly qualified teachers in Ireland has been widely researched, there is a comparative paucity of research on the teacher identity of mid- to late-career teachers, particularly at second-level. Starting from the position that processes of identity construction do not operate in a vacuum, this study suggests that providing an insight into the teacher identity narratives of experienced teachers can help to shed light on the context in which the emerging identities of current entrants to the profession will be constructed. Thus, a deeper understanding of the nuance and complexity of experienced teachers' identity narratives and the interplay of those narratives with social, cultural and historical contexts is essential in the fostering of a positive professional identity for emerging teachers. Similarly, an interrogation of the relationship between teacher identity and education policy in the career narratives of teachers with over 20 years' experience can offer some insight into the way in which these processes interact in ways that shape the enactment of policy.

In aiming to contribute to the teacher identity literature in the Irish context by addressing this gap, the study also aims to build on the existing literature by extending the use of feminist theory in the field of teacher identity research in Ireland. Adopting a feminist theoretical perspective to examine teacher identity has not been a strong feature of the research on mainstream education in the Irish context, where it has mostly been used in researching non-compulsory and higher education. Where it has been used within compulsory education, it has tended to be within research that explicitly addresses topics within the field of gender and sexuality studies. This study adopts a feminist theoretical perspective in the understanding that the tradition's attention to

nuance and complexity, along with its rejection of binaries and interrogation of dominant narratives, can usefully illustrate processes of teacher identity construction and the interplay of multiple narratives within those processes.

A further way in which the study builds on the existing literature in the Irish context is through bringing some additional nuance to the research on teacher professionalism. The research on this area has tended to focus on policy, often using critical discourse analysis to interrogate policies on teacher education and curriculum reform (e.g. Edling & Mooney Simmie 2018; Conway & Murphy 2013). The current study aims to complement the existing literature by highlighting the micro within the macro, that is, by bringing the focus to the individual within the policy process. The study's narrative lens offers an in-depth perspective on the social, cultural and political contextualisation of teacher professionalism within the teacher identity narratives of individual teachers. In this way, it brings together the national and international literatures by locating supranational discourses of teacher professionalism at the local and individual level. By highlighting some of the particularities of the operation of these discourses in the Irish context, it aims to contribute both to an understanding of the Irish policy context and also to the international literature on the intersections of teacher identity, teacher professionalism and education policy.

4. Research Methodology

The study's methodological framework and theoretical framework are closely interwoven and are informed by work in the sociology and philosophy of education and in the feminist tradition more broadly. The frameworks are rooted in the theoretical commitments introduced above, with a particular attention to the concepts of voice and openness. The research methodology, including the research approach, method, and analytic method, was designed to operate in close alignment with the study's theoretical framework, drawing on Cavarero's work on the narratable self (2000) as a foundation to the methodology. A small-scale, in-depth study was chosen as the most appropriate means by which to address the research questions while remaining cognisant of the commitments made in the theoretical framework. The study takes an interpretive research approach and uses a qualitative method involving narrative interviewing. A

purposive sampling approach was used as the research participants needed to fit within certain parameters according to the extent of their teaching experience. The participants were recruited through notices in teacher union publications, teacher forums on social media, and through the researcher's professional networks. While the study does not adhere strictly to a pre-existing method, its approach is informed by the fields of life history (Goodson & Sikes 2001) and narrative inquiry (Goodson 2013; Clandinin & Connelly 2000) and by the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (Wengraf 2001). As is the case with the other aspects of the study's methodology, the framework for analysis was designed to operate in alignment with the study's theoretical framework. It involves two analytic approaches, the first a narrative analysis involving iterative close reading and the second a thematic analysis using qualitative data analysis software.

5. Overview and Structure of Dissertation

The dissertation consists of two parts, the first contextualising the study and giving an overview of its approach and methodology, and the second presenting and discussing its findings. Following this introduction, Chapter Two provides a context for the study. It begins by introducing some key themes and issues in the global contemporary context that influence the national context of the study and that are relevant to the study's core arguments. These include the increasing internationalisation of educational policy trends and the problematic positioning of teacher professionalism as a policy discourse. The second part of the chapter focuses on the national context. It highlights some of the key historical and cultural factors that have shaped and continue to shape second-level education in Ireland, discusses some particularities in terms of the aims and guiding philosophy of the education system and highlights some inconsistencies in the pattern of educational change in that context. Chapter Two concludes by giving a brief overview of the key education policy moments of the past four decades in the Irish context in order to temporally locate the careers of the research participants.

Chapter Three provides a review of the empirical and theoretical literature that informs the study and indicates the areas to which it makes a contribution. It begins by discussing the international and national literature on teacher identity, providing a

rationale for the study of the concept and indicating which themes and issues from within this literature inform the study's understanding of teacher identity and interpretation of the interview narratives. The following section reviews the literature that brings together teacher identity and education change, highlighting concepts that are relevant to the findings of the study such as policy enactment, teacher agency and change-related vulnerability. The chapter turns to the theoretical literature for its final section. The section begins by discussing work that brings a feminist theoretical perspective to education research. It then introduces the two core theorists upon whose work the study's theoretical framework is built: Adriana Cavarero and Judith Butler. The section discusses the areas of their respective work that influence the study's framework and then outlines how their theories are brought alongside each other in the framework that shapes the study's methodology and analysis.

The final chapter in the first part of the dissertation is Chapter Four, which discusses the study's methodology. It begins by outlining the ontological and epistemological positions that form the foundation to the methodology and indicates how the theoretical framework aligns itself with these positions. Having established the study's guiding philosophical and theoretical commitments, the next sections describe in turn the research approach, the research method, the instrument, the sampling approach and the framework for analysis. In each case, the discussion indicates how the choices made fit within the overall research design and how they are informed by the theoretical framework. The chapter then discusses the question of research ethics and indicates the limitations to the study. The final section in the chapter briefly introduces each of the research participants whose stories and voices form the core of the second part of the dissertation.

Part Two of the dissertation presents and discusses the findings of the research, placing them within the context of the empirical and theoretical literature discussed in the first part, and develops an argument from the findings around the concept of ethical teacher professionalism and what that might look like in practice. The second part consists of three chapters, each of which addresses a different pairing of themes that emerged from the findings, and a final chapter which synthesises the arguments and offers some concluding suggestions and recommendations.

The first findings chapter, Chapter Five, is organised around the themes of status and power. It discusses the operation of these themes within the teacher identity

narratives of the research participants, with particular attention to the manner of their intersection with the concepts of voice and agency. The discussion contextualises the operation of status and power in the individual narratives within national and international policy discourses and theorises their operation through the lens of Cavarero and Butler's respective work around recognition and vulnerability.

Chapter Six continues in the theoretical direction set in Chapter Five by looking more closely at the ethics of recognition. The structuring pair of themes for this chapter are relationality and recognition. These two themes are paired together because they offer the potential to counter the more negative effects of concepts such as isolation and competitive individualism, each of which emerged strongly from the interview narratives. The chapter opens with a discussion of the operation of collegiality within the educational contexts in which the teachers work, highlighting the absence of collegiality which has been the experience of many of the teachers, but also pointing out some examples in which teachers have had more positive experiences. The concepts of recognition, voice, and vulnerability are used to develop these discussions theoretically. This leads into the second part of the chapter, which focuses on the notion of competitive individualism and the increase in its discursive dominance perceived by the teachers in the educational contexts in which they work. Cavarero's work on uniqueness is brought together with the theories of relationality developed by Cavarero and by Butler respectively to challenge some assumptions around these interpretations of individualism.

Chapter Seven picks up on the arguments made in the previous chapter around relationality and recognition and frames them through a lens of accountability, in the sense of accountability as responsibility to the Other. The chapter discusses the model of punitive accountability experienced by many of the teachers, locating this model within national and international discourses of teacher professionalism. It then outlines some alternative ways in which accountability is interpreted by the teachers and argues that these experiences point to the potential for developing more ethical models of accountability within teacher professionalism which are founded on autonomy and on relational responsibility.

The conclusion to the dissertation gathers together the various arguments made in the discussion of the findings. Some key issues that emerge with regard to second-level teacher identity in the Irish context are highlighted. Following the discussion of

the conclusions that are relevant to the national context, the central research question is addressed by drawing the various strands of the dissertation's argument together within a reframed model of ethical teacher professionalism. The conclusion outlines what this model might look like in practice and makes some recommendations as to how it could be put into operation within educational contexts, before finally suggesting some potential avenues for further research.

Chapter 2

National and International Context of the Study: Historical Overview, Contemporary Issues and Global Policy Trends

1. Introduction

Teacher identity, while unique to each individual teacher, is nevertheless socially and temporally situated. As such, it cannot be isolated from the educational contexts experienced by the teacher over the course of their career. In order to gain a nuanced understanding of the teacher identity narratives of the research participants, it is necessary to place those narratives within their educational context. Thus, this chapter provides an overview of the national and international educational contexts which form the backdrop for the teacher identity narratives of the research participants. In doing so, it also highlights some of the principal debates shaping contemporary educational discourse nationally and internationally as it relates to teacher identity and teacher professionalism. Naturally, it is beyond the scope of the chapter to offer a detailed insight into each of these debates. Rather, it will outline the key issues in broad brushstrokes and will locate the study within the particular areas to which it aims to make a contribution.

The chapter is divided into three parts, beginning broadly with the international education policy context and then focusing more narrowly on the historic and contemporary national policy context. The first part of the chapter outlines some core themes shaping the international educational context as it relates to teacher identity. The first section outlines some of the principal features of the global education policy context, such as the supranational influences on education policy and the rise in standardisation and evaluation mechanisms within education. The second section then focuses on the concept of teacher professionalism as policy discourse, a particular aspect of the international context that informs this study's investigation of teacher identity.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the second-level education system in Ireland, placing it within its international context and discussing the particularities to the ways in which international educational discourses operate in the Irish context. It discusses the literature around the aims and guiding philosophies of the Irish education system and then looks at the pattern of education change in the context of Irish second-level education. The following section will explore the idea of developmental phases as a heuristic device through which to interpret the historical context of education in Ireland and links this idea to Hargreaves' work on the ages of teacher professionalism (2000).

The next part of the chapter provides an overview of some key points in relation to the second-level teaching profession in the Irish context, including demographics and social status. It also outlines the important historical phases and policy moments in the Irish educational context over the past 40 years that are relevant to the professional lives of second-level teachers. This is in order to contextualise the teacher identity narratives of the research participants. It provides a historical background to their careers and introduces the reader to some of the principal topics and key moments which arose in the course of the research interviews and which will be discussed further in the findings chapters. This final part of the chapter is divided into three chronological sections. The first section looks at the decades from the early 1970s to the 1990s, an era in which education change can be described with the term incremental gradualism. The next section focuses on the decade between 1990 and 2000, a period that was very active in terms of legislation and education expansion, while the final section in the chapter looks at the years from 2000 up to the current moment, a period that featured an accelerated rate of education change and an intensification of teachers' working conditions.

2. International Context: Education Policy Trends

Education reform - a supranational policy narrative

In an increasingly globalised world, education systems are not only influenced from within the nation state but are shaped by international and supranational discourses and policy actors, a shift that has been characterised by Lingard and Rawolle (2011) as a move towards a 'postnational polity'. Many of the dominant trends have been connected

to supranational policy actors such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], the European Union [EU], the World Trade Organisation [WTO] and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO] (Lingard 2015; Torabian 2014; Ozga 2013; Sahlberg 2011). Dominant discourses of globalisation are legitimised and reinforced through a “global education policy field” (Lingard & Rawolle 2011, p.490). Within this policy field, international systems such as the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA] operate as “knowledge-based regulation tools” (Grek *et al.* 2013, p.487) to influence policy discourses and are used at national level to justify policy reforms through the perception created of an educational problem or crisis (Lingard 2013b). At the European level, Grek *at al.* describe the emergence of what they call the European Education Policy Space [EEPS] in which “new forms of governing activity” (2013, p.487) have developed. As a member state of both the OECD and the EU, Ireland has not been immune to the influence of these supranational policy actors. Indeed, Ireland’s fall in ranking in the PISA 2009 evaluation of teaching and learning can be described very much in terms of a perceived crisis point which opened a window for particular policy reforms (Conway & Murphy 2013), a topic which will be discussed in more detail below.

As can be expected in the globalised context described, there have been certain commonalities in the direction many countries’ education policies have taken in the last 20 years. Lingard points to how, out of Bernstein’s (1973) three message systems of schooling¹ - curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation - “the latter has become *a*, if not *the*, major policy steering mechanism” (Lingard 2013b, p.123). An example of how this macro-level turn to evaluation is interpreted at more local levels is the introduction of school self-evaluation, which acts as soft governance or ‘light-touch’ regulation that “encodes school knowledge, creates consensus and promotes specific values that relate to the creation of self-managed and self-sufficient individuals” (Ozga 2012, p.451).

Education policies following the global trends tend to include some combination of the following: a) an emphasis on teacher and school accountability, involving testing, inspection, publication of league tables, or performance-related pay; b) standardisation

¹ “Curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what counts as valid transmission of knowledge, and evaluation defines what counts as a valid realization of the knowledge on the part of the taught” (Bernstein, 1973: 85)

of learning goals, with a focus often on learning outcomes in the form of test results; c) an increase of managerialism bringing elements and strategies from the private sector into the running of schools; d) performativity rhetoric, with implicit or explicit criticism of poor quality and under-performing teachers and schools; and e) a centring of teacher professionalism and teacher agency as an antidote to poor teacher quality, with an emphasis on raising standards in the profession. The introduction of policies following these trends is usually justified by reference to globalisation, competition and the requirements of the knowledge economy.

Teacher professionalism as international policy discourse

Teacher professionalism becomes a core concept in such policy discourses, along with the related concepts of teacher quality and effectiveness. Thompson and Cook (2014) observe that teaching, which has always ‘occupied an intensely ambivalent strategic position’ (Jones 1990, p.66, cited on p.704), has become ‘ontologically insecure’ (p.703) within contemporary global education reform discourses. In contexts influenced by these discourses, teachers are often characterised as a policy problem; “where poor performance is identified by a national policy maker [...] it is attributed to poor teacher quality and not to national policy” (Ozga 2013, p.297). Lingard observes that “teachers sit at the interplay [...] between external policy and internal classroom pedagogies” (2013b, p.128) and suggests that, in the current context, this interplay is particularly fraught:

“[t]here is probably now a disconnection, almost an incommensurability, between the habitus and disposition of high level policy makers and those who work in schools, a disjunction between global spaces and local places.”

(Lingard 2013b, p.127)

One of the challenges in exploring teacher professionalism is that professionalism in itself is a contested concept, for which there is a variety of definitions. The interpretation of professionalism that informs this study is described by Hargreaves as consisting of:

“a strong technical culture with a specialized knowledge base and shared standards of practice, a service ethic where there is a commitment to client needs, a firm monopoly over service, long periods of training, and high degrees of autonomy.”

(Hargreaves 2000, p. 152)

There has long been debate about whether teaching fulfils the characteristics of a profession outlined in the passage above, leading to the question of whether teaching is a fully fledged autonomous profession or whether it is better positioned as a quasi- or semi-profession. For example, Veenman argued in 1984 that many of the problems faced by beginning teachers arise from the uncertain professional character of teaching - the fact that it has no codified body of knowledge and skills, that teacher education is “characterised by little competition and selection” and that, “the educational programme, compared with other professions, is not very complex with regard to intellectual demands and organisational features” (Veenman 1984, p.167). These claims are particularly interesting when viewed 30 years later in light of the discourse of teacher professionalism which holds Finland’s model of rigorous and challenging teacher education as the global ideal. Many countries have followed this example and indicated a move towards full professionalism, by moving from teacher training colleges to university-based teacher education degrees. However as Bourke *et al.* note, “what professionalism is, how it can be defined and by whom, are still sites of struggle within the education sector”, despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that there are so many “government-led agendas calling for higher degrees of professionalism in education” (2015, p.84).

There are certain contradictions running through the professionalism discourse in its present form, particularly in terms of its effects on teacher identity. For example, while there is a call for increased teacher professionalism, the focus on externally managed accountability would appear to deny the profession a self-regulatory power, which is recognised to be one of the core tenets of classical professionalism. Similarly, teacher agency is identified as an aspiration but the increase in standardised testing means that teachers have little agency in how they assess the work of their students and of themselves. Furthermore, autonomy and collegiality are held to be key elements of teacher professionalism (e.g. Hargreaves 2000) and, yet, researchers comment that teachers in the past exercised a good deal more discretion over their daily practice, engaged in more collegial learning and had a stronger sense of the aims and purposes of their educational practice. Day, for example, comments that “in the past, by and large, teachers were trusted to do a good job with minimum direct intervention by government into matters of school governance” (2002, p.679). Day (2002, p.686) addresses such inconsistencies and details four ways in which current reforms ostensibly aimed at

raising teaching standards actually in the long term reduce educational standards: they diminish teacher agency; they implicitly encourage uncritical compliance; they challenge teachers' substantive identity; and they reduce the time teachers have to care for students.

Biesta (2013) suggests that the current policy rhetoric around teacher professionalism in fact emphasises a deprofessionalisation² of teaching, a trend that he argues must be addressed. Resisting deprofessionalisation would involve countering the implication that teachers are merely a conduit to knowledge as opposed to possessors and developers of knowledge in their own right, as well as resisting the depiction of the student as "a student-consumer whose needs need to be met in the most effective way" (2013, p.460). Apple offers a way to understand this deprofessionalisation of teaching from an 'intensification' perspective, whereby the growing economic and management oriented pressures on education lead to an intensification of work, with an associated implied deskilling (Hargreaves 2000; Apple 1996; Apple & Jungck 1990). Among the characteristics of intensification are a persistent sense of work overload, which leads to less 'down time' and thus less time to keep up with developments in subject area or to engage in reflection. Intensification reduces teachers' "areas of personal discretion, inhibits involvement in and control over longer-term planning, and fosters dependency on externally produced materials and expertise" (Hargreaves & Fullan 1992, p.88). In such conditions, teachers are able to focus on only the essential tasks, leading to corners being cut and to decreased collaboration with colleagues. Furthermore, a diversification of expertise and a reliance on external experts can lead to doubts about one's own competence (Ballet *et al.* 2006, p.210). According to Day,

"although school contexts continue to mediate the short term effects of the intensification of work [...], the persisting effect is to erode teachers' autonomy and challenge teachers' individual and collective professional and personal identities."

(Day 2002, p. 678)

In sum, it could be argued that the trends associated with the intensification thesis "imply a more or less pervasive questioning of teachers' professional identity" (Ballet *et al.* 2006, p.217). This study is informed by these concepts, deprofessionalisation and intensification, in its discussion of the research participants' teacher identity narratives

² The terms 'professionalisation' and 'deprofessionalisation' are both used in the literature to refer to the effects discussed here. For clarity and consistency, 'deprofessionalisation' will be used throughout this dissertation.

and, in particular, the operation of discourses of accountability and autonomy within those narratives.

Of course there are also elements of the international policy trends that are potentially positive in terms of teacher professionalism, such as the teacher-researcher movement and the emphasis on reflective practice. However, the risk is that these movements are becoming subsumed by the general trend towards intensification and that the interpretation that emerges of them is that they are simply another layer in the drive towards externally defined and evaluated accountability (Beauchamp 2015). The instrumentalisation of reflective practice in teacher education results in a limited and limiting interpretation of the practice, where it is translated into a measurable and quantifiable concept (e.g. McGarr & McCormack 2014). There is a misalignment thus between policy rhetoric around teacher professionalism and the reality of the ways in which those policies are interpreted and enacted.

Furthermore, while many policies around teacher professionalism were ostensibly developed in order to improve teaching and learning and the rhetoric contained within the policy documents positions the teacher as being agentic within this process, it has been observed in the literature that teachers do not experience it in this positive way. This has been characterised as the ‘paradox of autonomy’:

“reforms are shaped by [...] ideas and concepts, such as choice, autonomy and improvement in ways that, at first glance, might suggest that teachers have acquired freedom as autonomous professionals. However, the exact opposite has been observed in the blurring of boundaries leading to a ‘paradox of autonomy’.”

(Mooney Simmie *et al.* 2016, p.3)

These paradoxes within the professionalism rhetoric are also observed by Judyth Sachs (2016; 2001), who identifies two contrasting discourses within this site of struggle; 1) democratic professionalism, emerging from the profession itself and 2) managerial professionalism, emerging from governing authorities with an emphasis on accountability and continuing professional development. According to Sachs, the ‘paradox of autonomy’ means that the teaching profession is “being exhorted to be autonomous while at the same time it is under increasing pressure from politicians and the community to be more accountable” (2001, p.150). This tension between autonomy and accountability hinges on the type of accountability that is emphasised, the point being that there is a crucial difference between an accountability that allows room for teacher judgement and autonomy and an accountability that is rooted in prescription and

compliance. Sachs argues that the current policy focus on a “compliance and accountability approach, driven by an administrative rather than developmental imperative” has long-term effects in terms of leading to a profession who are “risk-averse” and “timid in their judgements” (2016, p.417). She calls for an alternative and more sustainable model of accountability, one that she calls ‘responsive accountability’ (Sachs 2016), a concept that informs this study’s interpretation of accountability within teacher professionalism.

Echoing Sachs’ concept of democratic professionalism, a counter trend emerging to the deprofessionalisation discourses is a call for teachers to take ownership of their own professionalism. This involves actively resisting discourses of derision and collaboratively negotiating a professional identity rather than having one imposed on them. Thomas (2011) argues that “teachers need to consider collectively how they define themselves, both in schools and in the wider community” if they are to challenge the teacher-as-problem discourse that increasingly features in many public and political arenas. She acknowledges that,

“[t]he tasks of reconceptualisation and engagement do not come easily to many teachers, but [they] are essential if the teaching profession is to challenge the deficit discourses [...] in order to frame future public agendas for schools and education, and so reestablish the teaching professional as a significant voice in public debates on education.”

(Thomas 2011, p.381)

Ball and Olmedo (2013) take the idea of the ‘problem’ of the teacher, as critiqued by policy analysts (Thompson & Cook 2014; Ozga 2013), and interrogate it from the individual teacher’s point of view. They highlight the subtle ways in which teachers resist dominant discourses to maintain their sense of self; “[t]his is not strategic action in the normal political sense. Rather it is a process of struggle against mundane, quotidian neoliberalisations” (*ibid*, p.85). Their paper is based on a series of email exchanges with teachers who contacted Ball in response to his ‘terror of performativity’ paper (2003) and the authors state that, in writing the paper they want,

“to address the particular plight of the teacher who stands alone in their classroom or their staff common room, and sees something ‘cracked’, something that to their colleagues is no more than the steady drone of the mundane and the normal, and finds it intolerable.”

(Ball and Olmedo 2013, p.85)

Through selected quotes from the correspondence they show how the constraints of contextual factors set limits to the possible teacher identity stories but that, nonetheless, the individuals in question demonstrate a conscious agency in rejecting or questioning the inevitability of the dominant policy stories; “Martin unsettles the mundane and rational truths of neoliberal education and questions the *obviousness* of things” (*ibid*, p. 89, emphasis in original). It is worth noting that, while the authors say that these teachers are, in their own words, ‘normal’ teachers, many of them are in fact undertaking PhDs or are very active in union politics (even the fact that they initiated the contact with Ball is, perhaps, not that ‘normal’). The challenge perhaps is to develop the individual agency expressed by these teachers in resisting and questioning the deprofessionalisation of teaching towards the type of collective teacher agency called for by Thomas (2011).

One way that collective teacher agency can resist the ‘inevitability’ of deprofessionalisation is by focusing on what Fullan *et al.* (2015) term professional capital. This concept encompasses teachers’ social, human and decisional capital and emphasises “developing individual and group actions that support accountability *within* the profession” (p.3, emphasis added). Typically, policymakers focus either on structural elements or individualistic elements as these are “most obviously amenable to regulation and public explanation” (p.4). However, Fullan *et al.* contend that lasting, deep and effective change must come from a focus on internal accountability, that is “a collective commitment and responsibility to improve student learning and strengthen the teaching profession” (p.4) and that this internal accountability must precede external accountability.

The discussion of the findings of this study will consider some of the implications of the increasingly ambiguous position of teacher professionalism for the teacher identity of the research participants. Building on the ideas outlined above about more sustainable models of accountability, the discussion will suggest some ideas for a reframing of teacher professionalism in a way that brings a model of accountability rooted in ethics and relationality to the fore.

3. Second-Level Education in the Irish Context

This section indicates some of the key historical and contemporary themes arising from the literature on second-level education in Ireland and connects those themes to the global educational context discussed above. The section also highlights some of the key educational and policy developments over the past 40 years in the Irish context. This is in order to situate the research participants' teacher identity narratives in their historical and social context.

Aims, purposes, and philosophy of education

In outlining the characteristics of the Irish education policy context, Mac an Ghail *et al.* highlight the following key issues:

“the dominance of a technical-rationalist approach to curriculum development (Gleeson 2000, p. 26); the consensualist and essentialist nature of discourse in Irish education (Lynch 1987); the anti-intellectual bias in Irish culture (Lee 1989, p. 573).”

(Mac an Ghail *et al.* 2004, p.28)

This section explores some of these issues, the way in which they operate with regard to the guiding aims of the education system, and the implications of this policy context for both patterns of education change and interpretations of teacher identity. The section will locate the contemporary Irish educational context within international educational discourses, remembering however that, as Mac an Ghail *et al.* note, there is a particularity to the operation of educational discourses in Ireland and these have “not been merely an echo of those in other countries” (2004, p.211). O'Connor also picks up on this, noting that there is a “distinctiveness and peculiarity” to Irish education policy and practice (2014, p.196). Some of this can possibly be attributed to Ireland “having an exceptionally open economy since the 1960s and a relatively closed society” (Kitching 2010, p.218), meaning that there were contradictions and paradoxes within the manner in which global educational discourses operated in the Irish context.

One of the critiques arising from the literature on education in Ireland is that the system has historically lacked a strongly developed sense of educational aims and purposes (Gleeson 2010; O'Sullivan 2005; Mulcahy 1981). The key word here is 'educational' because it could be argued that the history of Irish education has in fact been shaped by very definite aims and purposes. The issue, however, is that those aims

were developed not by the State but rather by the Church³. Following this line of argument, it is then not the case that education in Ireland has lacked aims and purposes but rather that those aims were not necessarily those of a *public* education system. The State may have funded the system but, when it came to aims and purposes, it was arguably very much the Church's education system. The Department of Education saw its role as a technical and administrative one, a stance characterised by the Minister for Education Risteard Mulcahy's 1950 comment to the Dáil [house of parliament] that he viewed his role as the "dungarees man" who would "take the knock out of the pipes and link everything up" (Garvin 2004). Sugrue observes that, "any intrusion into schools beyond paying attention to examination results and so on was both resisted and resented by school authorities" and argues that this resentment towards a perceived intrusion continues still to "simmer below the surface" and acts as a barrier to genuine transformation (2012, p.100).⁴ An example of the slow pace of the decline of the Church's influence on education in the Irish context is that it was only in October 2018 that the use of religion as a selection criterion for school admission was prohibited (DES 2018).

In terms of more recently developed whole-system aims, Hogan makes the observation that "what progress has been made to date in the recent Irish experience of educational reform lies more in the dismantling of an old order than in any decisive advances in consolidating a new one" (2003, p.11). In other words, there was a desire to change the system but no fully developed sense of the aims or shape of that change. It is no surprise then that, through the 1970s and 1980s, as the Church's hold on society started to wane gradually and the education system found itself looking for a new sense of guiding purpose, the human capital paradigm with its emphasis on the links between education and the economy was able to take hold so firmly. The human capital paradigm in and of itself is not necessarily an entirely negative phenomenon. After all, it makes sense that education should help students develop the knowledge and skills necessary for them to participate in the economy. However, when it is not tempered and

³ For the purposes of this study, unless stated otherwise, 'the Church' is taken to signify the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland.

⁴ As of 2018, there are 715 second-level schools in the Republic of Ireland. 374 of those are secondary schools, owned by religious orders or trusts, 245 are vocational schools, owned by local Education and Training Boards, and 96 are community/comprehensive schools established by the State and owned by partnership boards of trustees. (Adapted from Coolahan 2003, p. 15 and DES 2018, p.2)

balanced with strongly established educational and pedagogical philosophies rooted in ideas of personal, social and moral good, it becomes a limited and limiting paradigm. It can be argued that this is what has occurred in Irish education. O’Flaherty and Gleeson (2014), building on Lee (1989), argue that, because Ireland did not have the same sociological and philosophical academic traditions as other European countries (i.e. independent from the Church), the country lagged behind its neighbours in terms of social and moral thought (2014, p.59) and that the effects of this are felt in the education system’s under-developed guiding philosophy. Another example of the effects of the emphasis on the human capital paradigm is that, while social inclusion has been a theme of education policy here, it tends to be interpreted in the simplistic sense of inclusion in the workforce (Lynch 1987) rather than in a more holistic sense of inclusion for the social good.

Following from this perspective of an education system lacking a strongly developed sense of itself as a public good, two key points emerge from the literature on Irish education. Firstly, the dominant positioning of education in the Irish context is as a servant of the economy. It can be argued from a current perspective that serving the economic needs of the country has in fact become the main purpose of education, based on the knowledge economy rhetoric that dominates so much education policy, a phenomenon that is, of course, not limited solely to Ireland (Barry 2014; O’Connor 2014; Conway & Murphy 2013; O’Sullivan 2005). This would fit with Mulcahy’s contention that what was lacking in Irish education was “a clear view of the overall purposes or aims of post-primary education and how the more specific purpose of serving the economic needs of the country are related to it” (1981, p.51) and his warning that this could have long-term negative implications.

This brings us to the second key point: the absence of a long-term vision. This is seen most clearly in the manner in which reforms tend to involve “tinkering at the edges” (Stoll & Fink 1996) rather than any meaningful changes. Sugrue talks of a “preoccupation with rules, procedures and compliance” at the expense of long-term vision and imagination, leading to a situation where “despite rapid changes, many aspects of contemporary practice continue to have their roots in the nineteenth century” (2012, pp.101-102). A lack of clarity and coherence around any strong central philosophy of education can be linked to what Long (2008) describes as the noisiness of an education discourse field characterised by the “clamour for attention of various

interest groups”, which impedes the development of a clearly-articulated vision for the education system.

In terms of a guiding philosophy, researchers have pointed to a reluctance on behalf of education policymakers or practitioners to engage with philosophical and intellectual questions (Gleeson 2010; O’Sullivan, 2005). It could be argued that this reluctance was due to the assumption that the Church filled this intellectual role. Following this assumption, while it may be the case that the Church did play an important public role in engaging with intellectual and philosophical questions, it arguably also led to a reluctance to interrogate some of its core values. Given the dominance of the Church’s position within the education system, its values and assumptions were central to education in Ireland, an effect which has perhaps outlasted the decreasing influence of the Church as an institution.

For example, one of the dominant assumptions in education in the Irish context is the individualisation of responsibility. The assumption of individualised responsibility operates alongside a reductive understanding of equality, whereby equality is seen as an equal opportunity for the individual to succeed in the labour market by increasing their human capital (Lynch 1987). The focus is thus entirely on the individual rather than on structural issues. This focus can be seen in the two main discourses Seery identifies in the Irish educational context; firstly, the discourse of marketisation and globalisation and secondly, the discourse of developmental psychology, with its emphasis on individual intelligences (2008, p.134). However, the association of the individualisation of responsibility with the intensification of the market paradigm alone is not quite accurate. The assumption of individual responsibility can also be seen in Church thinking on the concept of the sinner and researchers such as Lynch (1987) identified individualism as having long been one of the dominant ideologies in Irish education. O’Connor’s observation that “the lack of faith in human potential has been the most destructive aspect of Ireland’s approach to education” (2014, p.197) can be read through this perspective of the individualisation of responsibility and challenges education policy rhetoric around equality and equity being defining characteristics of education in Ireland. This is rhetoric that is also strongly challenged by, for example, Drudy (2001) and Hyland (2011).

The scope of this study does not encompass a critical analysis of the overarching guiding philosophy of education in the Irish context. However, it is informed by some

of these ideas raised in the literature, in particular, the idea that the individualisation of responsibility in the Irish context predates the advent of the market paradigm. Building on this idea, and in the understanding that discourses do not operate in a vacuum, the study takes the position that discourses of individualism are not new to the Irish education context. In other words, although the dominance of current international discourses of individualisation mean that there may be a shift in emphasis, the context of Irish education is one that has been strongly shaped by prior understandings of individualism, a consideration that will be relevant to the findings of the study and will be further discussed at that point, particularly around the concepts of relationality, vulnerability, and interdependency.

Patterns of education change in the Irish context

As is to be expected given the points outlined above about the absence of a coherent philosophy in the Irish education system, educational change observed in the system tend to be patchwork and incremental. This is not to say that there have been no attempts at reforming the system. However, the pattern of reform has been described by Coolahan (2000) as “pragmatic gradualism” and the effects in practice could be argued to have been no more than what O’Connor (2014) characterises as a series of ‘add-ons’, with no deep change with regard to educational values and aims. This means that “[i]n reality, the structure of Irish second-level education remains largely as it was in 1965” (O’Connor 2014, pp.203-204).

One of the ways in which this lack of systemic change becomes clear is by studying critiques of policy written at various time points. For example, it is instructive to note how many of the issues identified by Mulcahy in 1981 are still shaping the direction of education change 35 years later. These include a mismatch between curriculum priorities and students’ life experiences, a lack of connection between primary and post-primary education, an over-emphasis on narrow systems of assessment and an over-reliance on traditional teaching techniques. The issues affecting the broader picture in Irish education have had a clear impact on the manner in which the curriculum has developed at second-level. Lacking any overarching theoretical vision, curriculum reform has tended to be piecemeal and disjointed, resulting in changes to processes and procedures rather than any deep change to the philosophy behind the curriculum. As with other areas of education, some of the core assumptions

at the heart of the curriculum remain unexamined and such debate as exists tends to focus on the what and how rather than the why. Lynch (1989), Hyland (2011), and O’Flaherty and Gleeson (2014) are all critical of the extent to which rote-learning, exam-focused teaching and egocentrism shape student and teacher understandings of learning in the Irish second-level context. According to Granville,

“[t]he tradition of centrally prescribed syllabus, curriculum and assessment matters [...] especially in post-primary schools has formed a consensus around an uncontested conception of curriculum.”

(Granville 2011, p.129)

One issue is that many attempts at reform ignore the educational and social contexts in which the reforms are to be implemented. An effect of this, and one which is relevant to this study, is that changes are often proposed without adequate consideration of the teaching profession’s morale at a given time, the result being that it, and subsequent changes associated with it, are rejected outright, regardless of their actual content. This question of attention to context is of course not unique to Ireland. Recent research by Priestley *et al.* (2015) on Scottish teachers’ engagement with reforms offers useful parallels to consider in the Irish context. They suggest that among the ‘currents of thinking’ amongst Scottish teachers there is evidence of a limited professional discourse, involving:

“a deference to authority, a lack of willingness to take responsibility for issues seen to be the remit of those further up the chain and nervousness about being ‘required’ to be autonomous in their work.”

(Priestley *et al.* 2015, pp.632-633)

Priestley *et al.* make the point that their paper could be construed as being negative about the teachers in question but that that is not their intention. They were in fact impressed by the teachers’ commitment and attitude. The fact that the teachers’ professional discourse is limited is to do with context, not with individual capacity. This is a key issue to be considered in the Irish context, and this study aligns itself with these arguments.

A persistent issue that has thwarted attempted reforms in the Irish context is that there is often inadequate time and space for developing understanding of the reform. McMorow highlights this, pointing out in her analysis of the barriers to the

implementation of the Junior Certificate curriculum⁵ that reforms have repeatedly been introduced “while the implementation of current initiatives is far from complete and the problems of implementation have not been addressed” (2006, p.328). If anything, this has intensified over recent decades. Gleeson observes that, “[o]ver the past 20 years, Irish post-primary education has experienced a proliferation of top-down curriculum reforms” (2012, p.3). The top-down nature of reform attempts and the lack of attention to context means that the reforms are either rejected or that changes tend to be of a short-term and superficial nature, a phenomenon that has been identified in international research on teacher ownership of education change (Fullan 2000). The literature on reforms in the Irish context that illustrates these barriers to change includes research on the new Junior Certificate in the early 1990s (Sexton 2007; Griffin 1998), and the Exploring Masculinities⁶ programme in the 1990s (McCormack & Gleeson 2012; Mac an Ghaill *et al.* 2004). Halbert and MacPhail’s study of the implementation of a new Physical Education curriculum in the early 2000s highlighted that the main barriers to the implementation of the curriculum were structural, involving questions of infrastructure, information and in-service training. The in-service training was a particular issue, as teachers were not involved in the curriculum development phase and so wanted “to receive considerably more specific central guidance related to the delivery of the syllabus, looking to receive appropriate training and resources from central agencies” (2010, p.29).

The tensions between the historical culture of education in Ireland and concepts of accountability, autonomy, and responsibility will be discussed further in later chapters. Given that the teaching careers of the research participants in this study have spanned many of the reform initiatives outlined above, the intersections of education change and teacher identity will be discussed in the findings chapters with a view to unpacking some of the ways in which macro processes of reform are interpreted and enacted at the meso-level of the school and at the micro-level of the individual and how

⁵ The Junior Certificate was the programme for curriculum and assessment at lower second-level, introduced in 1989 and phased out from 2015 onwards, when it has been replaced by the Junior Cycle programme.

⁶ Exploring Masculinities was a gender studies curricular programme designed for use in single-sex boys’ schools. It was piloted during the late 1990s and was the subject of intense public and media debate.

these processes are positioned in the teacher identity narratives of the individual teachers.

Missing developmental phases: a heuristic device

In order to understand the way in which Irish education has developed, it is helpful to think in terms of developmental phases, and to set these phases within a broader social and political context. One of the key characteristics of Irish social history is the manner in which the country changed from one in which the Church was the principal influence on behaviour and politics to one in which the economy and market took that role (Coakley & Gallagher 2010; Lynch 2006; O’Sullivan 2005; Garvin 2004). This is of course a change that happened in various ways in many European countries. However, what sets the Irish experience apart is the later time period during which the change happened and the rapidity of the shift once it began. As Coolahan observed in 2003,

“Ireland has been experiencing a period of profound economic, social, technological, occupational, cultural and demographic change. It has probably had to accommodate this accelerated pace of change within a shorter time span than most developed countries.”

(Coolahan 2003, p.1)

The Church’s sway in Irish society was still strong up to the later decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, into the 1990s one could still see the power of the Church’s voice in debates such as that around the 1995 referendum on divorce and the 1992 referendum on abortion availability. Although Church influence was waning in this time, it was possibly only with the publication in the 2000s of the Ferns Report⁷ and the Ryan Report⁸ on child abuse within Church institutions that its dominant hold on Irish society was really broken. Arguably, what this long period of Church power in both public and private domains meant was that the broader debates that were happening elsewhere in the world in the twentieth century largely passed Ireland by. Where other countries were examining and debating narratives for living, Ireland had its

⁷ The Ferns Report (2005), commissioned by the Irish government to investigate allegations of child abuse by clerics in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ferns.

⁸ The Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (2009), known as the Ryan Report after the commission’s chair, Justice Seán Ryan.

unquestioned narrative provided by the Church and there was little room for alternative voices or for dissent.

Another reason that Ireland can be said to have missed out on some of the main European debates of the twentieth century was that the country was still a relatively new state⁹. For example, where other countries' politics involved ideological and philosophical debates between the left and the right about what it meant to be a democracy, or what the public good was, in Ireland the debate was between two dominant parties who were divided by their opposition in the country's Civil War (1922-1923) rather than by any real differences in political philosophy or ideology. It can be argued thus that Ireland in a way missed out on modernity, lacking as it did the independent intellectual traditions that would challenge the influence of the Church. Certainly, it had its literary giants that were very much part of the European intellectual movement in the first half of the twentieth century. However, it cannot be coincidental that so many of those figures chose to spend their lives elsewhere, an indictment surely on the stifling nature of society at home in Ireland at the time. Similarly, the student movements of the 1960s did not take root in Ireland to the extent that they did in countries with a strong tradition of public debate and protest and, although there was a protest known as the 'Gentle Revolution' in University College Dublin in 1968, it focused more on specific issues in teaching rather than on broader social issues.

The 1990s can be seen to be the decade during which the country had come to the point where it was ready to definitively step away from the hold of the Church. It was a decade which saw a number of landmark shifts in public and social policy on issues that heretofore would have been seen as the moral domain of the Church (e.g. homosexuality being decriminalised in 1993, divorce being legalised in 1995). At this time, given that the country had arguably not developed a strong tradition of public debate or a sense of alternative ways of being, it is perhaps unsurprising that it slipped straight from the hold of one powerful dogma into another, this one being that of the market and of neoliberalism (Lolich 2011). This can be seen to have come about for a number of reasons (O'Connor 2014; Gleeson 2010; O'Sullivan 2005; Lynch 1987). Firstly, there was not a strong tradition of public dissent, meaning that it was relatively easy to reach consensus around a single political philosophy. Furthermore, having been

⁹ The Irish Free State was established in 1922, following the War of Independence (1919-1921). Ireland declared itself a Republic in 1937.

in the hold for so long of a religious dogma with no room for individuality, society was very quick to embrace individualism (although it is not quite the same thing as individuality). Meanwhile, in concrete terms, the quality of life for very many people *did* improve during this time, despite entrenched inequalities, and it was thus difficult for dissenting voices to be heard. Finally, there was no real tradition of acting in the public good, given that Church thinking emphasised the individual sinner so much, and this allowed the neoliberal idea of individual responsibility for success or failure to take firm hold.

Of course, Ireland was not alone at this time in experiencing neoliberalism as a policy influence. However, there was perhaps a particularity in Ireland's experience. Where other countries adopted neoliberal ideas in response to a feeling that the State's power of intervention needed to be scaled back, in Ireland it was *Church* power that was being scaled back. The State never was particularly interventionist in Ireland or, where it was, it acted as a channel for Church thinking (Gleeson 2010; O'Sullivan 2005). Thus, the point of departure for many other countries turning to neoliberalism was a state-led social democracy, something that in Ireland was not as developed as in those contexts. Attempts to question new assumptions or to temper the effects of the new paradigm thus operated very differently in Ireland and had different points of comparison. This made it difficult to defend the idea of the State and the public good against neoliberalism when there was perhaps only a vague idea of what those concepts might actually look like in the Irish context.

Stemming from this there is arguably a misalignment to be seen in critiques of neoliberalism in the Irish context. These critiques are generally apt in their assessment of the current context and the influence of individualism and performativity and other such trends associated with neoliberalism on Irish social and economic policy. Such critiques are indeed essential to avoid the unquestioning consensualism of the 1990s that led to the post-2008 recession. However, if there is a flaw with some of these critiques, it is that they can seem to hark back to a pre-neoliberal concept of the state that arguably did not exist in the Irish context. Taking their cue from critiques in other contexts, they discuss the public good, the social contract, and progressiveness as though they were concepts familiar to society in Ireland when, arguably, Ireland in the twentieth-century did not truly experience those concepts.

The context of education in Ireland can be seen to align itself with this notion of missed phases. Many critics of the effects of the market paradigm on Irish education refer to concepts such as teacher professionalism and autonomy as though they were always core aspects of teaching in Ireland until neoliberalism came along. However, a more nuanced view suggests that, as in broader society, the jump from pre-modern to hyper-postmodernity can be seen in the development of Irish education. Examining the history of educational research in Ireland, Sugrue calls the manner in which “international debates and controversies [...] have largely passed us by in this jurisdiction” an example of a “silence in the Irish system” (Sugrue 2009, p.22). O’Sullivan draws attention to this idea of a silence around the missed debates in the Irish context in observing that critique of education policy in Ireland should not assume that the “debates elsewhere on the marketisation of education and on the impact of ‘New Right’ and economic liberalism on educational policy” (2005, p. 109) can be directly transposed to the Irish context. This is because

“what such educational systems have in common - England, the US, Australia and New Zealand are examples - is a background of welfare state, anti-racist, and equality interventions. In this they differ from the Irish experience in which the vision of education that preceded the mercantile paradigm was one inspired by a Roman Catholic world view.”

(O’Sullivan 2005, p.109)

O’Sullivan’s core argument is that Irish education went from a theocentric model to a market-oriented model without experiencing a phase between those models in which liberal and progressive forms of education were developed in the way that they were in other jurisdictions during the mid-twentieth century. As Ball puts it, O’Sullivan “offers the thesis that Irish education moved from a pre-modern to a post-modern education system without ever developing a modern, public, shared and democratic education paradigm” (Ball 2007, p.119).

The heuristic of missed developmental phases that offers some insight into the narrative of Irish education policy is one that also informs this study in its interrogation of teacher identity in the Irish context. For example, Gleeson highlights the manner in which certain key shifts in thinking around teaching and learning have “largely passed us [Ireland] by”. These include

“key themes of teacher professionalism, such as the political and moral role of the teacher, the distinction between teacher professionalism and professionalisation, schools

as learning organisations and collaborative cultures, the teacher as researcher and reflective practitioner, school-based curriculum development, and democratic and illuminative approaches to curriculum evaluation.”

(Gleeson 2010, p.373)

Hargreaves’ theory of teacher professionalism is useful here in that it identifies four phases of teacher professionalism that can be used to understand teacher identity in various contexts. Those phases are the pre-professional age, the age of the autonomous professional, the age of the collegial professional and the age of the post-professional or postmodern professional (Hargreaves 2000). Mac an Ghaill *et al.* suggest that the experiences of the teachers in their research “are most consistent with autonomous professionalism”, where individual autonomy is understood in terms of teachers being “left [...] to their own devices in the classroom” (Mac an Ghaill *et al.* 2004, p.191). Coolahan makes a similar observation, saying that “in Ireland, the syndrome of the teacher being ‘king or queen of the classroom’ has been strong” (Coolahan 2003, p.67). This is consistent with, for example, the findings around collegiality in teaching and learning in the OECD’s 2008 Teaching And Learning International Survey [TALIS], where teachers in the Irish context are more likely to engage in ‘basic co-operation activities’ than the higher-level ‘professional collaboration’. Other findings of interest from that study suggest that teachers in Ireland favour direct transmission beliefs and structuring teaching practices to constructivist beliefs and student-oriented practices (Shiel *et al.* 2009). Taken together, these findings suggest that the characteristics of the second age of teacher professionalism are still quite dominant in the Irish context.

The fourth age of teacher professionalism, which Hargreaves suggests the teaching profession in many Anglophone contexts was entering at his time of writing in 2000, is marked by a tension between two models of teacher professionalism. This tension includes many of the questions discussed earlier around deprofessionalisation and dominant interpretations of accountability and autonomy. As Hargreaves describes it, the post-professional model risks diminishing teacher professionalism “by returning teachers to the hands-on, intuitive, learn-as-you-go approach of the pre-professional age, or by subjecting them to the detailed measurement and control of narrowly conceived competence frameworks; or both”, whereas the post-modern model “is broader, more flexible and more democratically inclusive of groups outside teaching and their concerns than its predecessors” (Hargreaves 2000, p.167). In the Irish context,

the current policy rhetoric around enhancing teacher professionalism (Teaching Council 2016) includes many of the themes outlined by Gleeson above as core components of teacher professionalism (e.g. schools as collaborative cultures, teachers as researchers, reflective practice). However, through a combination of poor communication, unfortunate timing and cultural factors, their interpretation has arguably been more reminiscent of Hargreaves' post-professional model than his post-modern model.

Using Hargreaves' phases as a heuristic, it could be asked whether, in the Irish context, the profession is missing some of the characteristics that it would have developed had it passed through a sustained phase of collegial professionalism. Aligning this line of inquiry with the literature on education policy's jump from a theocentric to a mercantile paradigm (Gleeson 2010; O'Sullivan 2005), one could ask whether it is plausible that the teaching profession in Ireland jumped from pre-professional and autonomous professional straight to post-professional with its markers of individualism and managerialism, without having experienced a third age of collegial professionalism. This idea is not intended as a statement of absolute truth but rather as a device or a useful lens through which to consider teacher professionalism in the Irish context. The intent in raising the question is to avoid the assumption in some of the literature critiquing the current direction of education policy, which positions teaching in Ireland as though it *had* passed through each of these stages. Such an assumption risks mischaracterising the historical context of the teaching profession in Ireland and glosses over some of the vulnerabilities within the profession that make it more susceptible to the negative effects of discourses of post-professionalism.

4. The Teaching Profession in the Irish Context: Demographics and Status

This section briefly outlines some of the key historical and contemporary characteristics of entrants to the second-level teaching profession in Ireland. This is in order to provide a demographic context for the research participants and to indicate some of the changes that have occurred in terms of the intake to the profession over the period of their teaching careers.

According to Coolahan, "Ireland is comparatively fortunate regarding the quality of its recruits into teaching" and "[t]his is a priceless asset, which should not be taken

for granted” (2001, p.345). It has been shown that, statistically, there has been a gradual improvement in the degree attainment levels of postgraduate entrants to teacher education. For example, Heinz found that

“[t]he high academic calibre of PGDE [Postgraduate Diploma in Education] students has been illustrated by the high proportion of entrants with honours-level primary degrees (86.6%) which has also been shown to have increased over the years under consideration.”

(Heinz 2013, p.141)

However, it is worth bearing in mind that, as there has been general grade inflation at third-level in that period (Irish Times 2014), this does not necessarily reflect an increase in the academic calibre of teaching entrants.

Research shows that the entrants to the teaching profession tend to be quite homogeneous and are those who have ‘fitted’ well in the current system (Heinz 2013). Keane and Heinz (2015) comment that “the homogeneity of the teaching profession is particularly notable, with teachers being predominantly white, female, and of majority-group ethnic and social class backgrounds” (p. 281). 88.2% of teacher entrants in Heinz’ (2013) study are of Roman Catholic backgrounds. In 1985 there was a 50:50 ratio between males and females in the second-level teaching profession. However, the percentage of men has declined since then and by 2004 it was 60:40 (O’Connor 2009, p. 142). In 2016 70% of graduates from education degree programmes were female (CSO 2016).

Heinz (2013) found that “student teachers from the lower social classes are under-represented, and that there is little variety in terms of Postgraduate Diploma in Education students’ second-level educational experiences” (p.139). There is arguably a possibility that such teachers would tend towards a ‘cultural deficit approach’ when working with students who may not share the same social or educational backgrounds. For example, McCoy and Byrne (2011) found that members of the “non-manual group were often directed away from higher education, perceived that they were not considered higher education ‘material’ by teachers and guidance staff” (p.151). A further issue to be noted is that the majority of teacher entrants “lack first-hand experience of the more technical and vocational education as well as of the alternative Leaving

Certificate Programmes (LC Vocational Programme, LC Applied Programme)¹⁰ provided and catered for by vocational and comprehensive schools” (Heinz 2013, p. 153). It is possible thus that those routes will be implicitly devalued in teacher discourse.

Much of the literature on teaching in the Irish context highlights that the profession has traditionally enjoyed a high status relative to other types of employment, with the idea of the ‘schoolmaster’ as one of the principal members of the community a common trope across culture and society. The high status enjoyed by the profession means that the assumption that the profession in turn attracts a high calibre of graduates is widely accepted and, indeed, the assumption has historically been borne out statistically (O’Flaherty & Gleeson 2016; O’Connor 2014; Sugrue 1997). As Conway and Murphy observe,

“Ireland has tended to pride itself on an excellent education system and on the quality of its teachers [...] Teaching is generally well respected and continues to attract high-attaining students.”

(Conway & Murphy 2013, p.15)

However, this historically high status was in relative terms and developed based on the position of the profession in a society with low overall levels of educational attainment, as evidenced in the 1965 ‘Investment in Education’ report, when only 50% of children stayed in school beyond the age of 13 (IIE 1965). Although this rate improved following the introduction in 1967 of free education at second-level, growth in higher education attainment was slow through to the late 1980s (O’Connor 2014). Since then, the continuing policy push towards improving education participation means that school completion rates have risen to well over 90% and the overall levels of educational attainment of the Irish population are among the highest in the EU and OECD regions (OECD 2018). Indeed, the rate of improvement in third-level education entry rates between 1995 and 2005 was higher in Ireland than in any other OECD country (O’Connor 2009). Such large increases were possible because Ireland had a low starting point compared to other European countries and “older Irish adults are poorly qualified by international standards” (O’Connor 2014, p.200). The scale of the change in the educational profile of the population is important in the context of this study because

¹⁰ The Leaving Certificate is the final assessment taken by students at the end of second-level education. It determines entry to third-level education. It consists primarily of a summative written examination, although some subjects have oral and project-based components.

the careers of the research participants span the period when this change was at its most rapid.

Teachers in Ireland are relatively well-paid and teacher salaries were in 7th place of 27 countries surveyed by the OECD in 2000 (Coolahan 2003, p.7). Despite teacher salaries in Ireland having decreased somewhat since that survey, in relative terms Ireland still ranks at 7th out of 33 OECD comparison countries for teacher salaries at upper secondary level with over 15 years' experience (OECD 2018a). However, this comes with the caveat that, since 2011, new entrants to teaching in the Irish context start on a salary scale that is approximately 10% lower than that of existing teachers (DES 2011a), meaning that, unless the pay cut is reversed, that position in the OECD scale is likely to drop sharply in coming years. Salaries take up a proportionately high amount of education budgets in Ireland, relative to comparison countries (82% in Ireland, 65% in Finland according to OECD 2010).

However, while teachers may be well-paid in Ireland relative to other countries, that is not necessarily the case compared to other professions *within* Ireland, as Hogan points out;

“[t]his [professional] dissatisfaction receives sharper definition of course from the rapid rise [...] of a new wave of businessmen and women whose salaries and lifestyles have leapfrogged those of the hardworking men and women who were their teachers just ten or fifteen years ago.”

(Hogan 2003, p.7)

This disparity has increased post-2008, when there were cuts made to salaries across the public sector in response to the 2008 economic recession. This has accelerated the trend predicted by Coolahan in 2003, when, in a report on attracting graduates to the teaching profession, he observed that

“an older tradition may be changing whereby many teachers no longer encourage their sons and daughters to follow in their professional paths, but to aspire to other careers in a greatly diversified job arena.”

(Coolahan 2003, p.10)

Writing in 2007, Sexton highlights teachers' social status as being the profession's main cause for concern identified by the teacher participants in his study. This is echoed in O'Sullivan *et al.* (2009), where they observe that some respondents to their study reported teachers dissuading them from choosing teaching as a profession, particularly where the student was an academic high-achiever:

“[s]ome of them left me with the impression that they thought I was showing a lack of ambition in wanting to be a teacher and almost made me feel guilty.”

(O’Sullivan et al. 2009, p.185)

That teachers themselves actively discourage academically strong students from entering teaching perhaps challenges some of the rhetoric about the high calibre and status of the profession. This ambiguous status and the questions it raises around teacher identity in the contemporary Irish context will be returned to in the discussion of the findings.

5. Historical Overview: Key Policy Moments in Irish Second-Level Education

This section gives an overview of the historical background and some of the principal policy moments that are relevant to the teacher identity narratives of the research participants. Two of the older teachers involved in the research entered initial teacher education at the end of the 1970s, while the other participants began their careers at various points throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s. The section is divided into three parts: pre-1990, where, as outlined above, the nature of change was incremental and pragmatic; 1990 to 2000, a decade which saw a number of educational reforms and cultural shifts; and post-2000, when global educational discourses have become increasingly influential.

Pre-1990: Incremental gradualism

The mid-1960s were a key era in the setting of an agenda for the Irish education system. The 1965 report ‘Investment in Education’ was the OECD’s first national report of its kind (OECD 1991, p.7). Its recommendations around increasing educational participation were influential in shifting Ireland’s educational policy position from a view of education as a necessary public expense to education as a driver of economic growth. It for the first time in the Irish context “characterized educational spending as a positive investment rather than as a social obligation” (O’Connor 2014, p.193). The report’s commissioning came at a time when the Irish economy was changing towards an open economy after decades of trade protection and the tone of the report very much matched the tone of optimistic long-term vision in the contemporary policy context.

‘Investment in Education’ opened a policy window, partly through the sense of crisis it created around its finding that fewer than half of Irish children stayed at school beyond the age of 13 (IIE 1965). This sense of crisis was essential in weakening the opposition to investing in policy initiatives such as vocational education and the removal of tuition fees for second-level education. Such a sense of crisis around education policy was perhaps not felt again until the PISA 2009 results 40 years later (Conway & Murphy 2013). In the intervening years, there was a more or less uncritical acceptance of a model of educational improvement that focused on increased participation as a measure of quality. As mentioned above, debates around different models of education were not felt to any great extent in Ireland. According to Sugrue, “the paradigm wars that have been waged on both sides of the Atlantic have largely passed us by here in Ireland” (2009, p.8).

After the ‘Investment in Education’ report and the Minister for Education Donogh O’Malley’s announcement in 1967 on foot of the report that second-level education was to be free of charge, there was little substantial change from the late 1960s through the 1970s and 1980s. One key policy moment in this period was the 1982 prohibition of corporal punishment, a move which was of social and cultural significance and which, for two of the research participants in this study, features as a key moment in their teaching identity narratives. This will be further discussed in Chapter 5, which explores questions of power and status in the context of education.

Another important policy moment from this time period was Ireland’s joining the European Economic Community [later the EU] in 1973. This was not mentioned by any of the research participants, however it can be described as a key historical moment in the context of Irish education because of the EU’s continuing and, indeed, increasing influence on educational policymaking processes (Ozga 2013).

Otherwise in this period, education policy as a whole did not do much more than tweak aspects of the system. Overall, structures were left more or less as they were, increasing in quantitative capacity certainly, but not altering much in the way of curriculum, pedagogy, or assessment. Some exceptions to this include curriculum development projects set up in the 1970s, the Shannon Humanities Project and the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee, which were school-based and teacher-driven with emphasis on teacher ownership and local needs. However, these projects were not replicated in other areas and were wound down following the establishment of

the centralised Curriculum and Examinations Board in the 1980s. Walshe (1999) contends that, while the state did adopt a more interventionist role in education from the 1960s onwards, the system only began to gain in coherence and direction from the late 1980s. From this period and through the 1990s the level of policy debate and legislation increased.

1990 - 2000: A decade of change

The decade leading up to the Education Act 1998 saw much activity in terms of education legislation, including the 1992 Green Paper ‘Education for a Changing World’, the 1993 National Education Convention and the 1995 White Paper ‘Charting our Education Future’. According to Coolahan the 1990s represented

“an era of unprecedented analysis, appraisal, consultation, educational policy formulation and legislation which greatly changed the general climate and re-established a more affirmative, partnership approach on teacher education as on education policy generally.”

(Coolahan 2007, pp.4-5)

Related to this, the period saw an increase in the level of public participation in education debates and a cementing of a consensus-based partnership approach to policymaking. The influence of the European Union was strengthening and, from the early 1990s onwards, “the social policy objectives of the European Union and the Council of Europe's Social Charter have been very influential in pushing equality of opportunity up the Irish policy agenda” (Gleeson 2010, pp.185-186). The OECD published a report in 1991 on the Irish education system which observed that the system

“has had to manage [a] quantitative expansion and considerable qualitative improvement while respecting the sensitivities of powerful interest groups and avoiding any root-and-branch reforms of structures or brusque changes of direction.”

(OECD, 1991)

Coolahan argues that the last two decades of the 20th century saw an unprecedented rate of change in society and thus in schools (2001, p.338). This period is particularly relevant to the study as the research participants all began their careers between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. Coolahan cites factors such as changing family structures, drug culture, and mass advertising that made the contexts in which schools operated by the late 1990s very different to how they might have been when many of the teachers in those schools were starting out their careers. The social contexts

of education in Ireland were undergoing rapid change at this time, with shifts in terms of demographics, culture, and politics. By 1995 there had been a net shift in migration numbers and for the first time in its history more people immigrated to the country than emigrated from it.

Walshe (1999) outlines some broad changes that were occurring in the context of Irish education over the decade before the 1998 Education Act. These include the waning power of the Church, the growth in the strength of the teacher unions' lobby, the redefining of parents' role and the deepening influence of the globalised knowledge economy discourse. Walshe identifies Mary O'Rourke, the Fianna Fáil Minister for Education from 1987 to 1991 as the initial catalyst for policy change, building on an "unstoppable momentum towards change on many fronts" (1999, p.7) that had gathered pace from the late 1980s. O'Rourke initiated the preparation of a Green Paper on education. A cursory glance at some of the proposals put forward in the 1991 draft Green Paper is an indication both of how far-sighted this early draft was and of how slowly change came about in the following years, despite the positive rhetoric about the 1990s as a decade of progress. Indeed, some of the proposals are still the topic of debate now, 25 years later. The 1991 proposals included a common form of initial teacher education, the establishment of a Teaching Council, the rationalisation of subjects for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate, emphasis on oral competence in Irish language learning, modularisation and credit transfer across all third-level education, and third-level access programmes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds

Rather than simply adopting the Green Paper when she became Minister for Education in 1993, Niamh Bhreathnach decided to hold a National Education Convention [NEC] that same year. The NEC invited all the education stakeholders to debate the issues raised by the Green Paper and by the rapidly changing social context. Many commentators, like Hogan (2003) and Walshe (1999), view the NEC as a key turning point in Irish education policymaking and as an example of a progressive and democratic participatory policy process. According to Hogan,

"the National Education Convention of 1993 marks a watershed in Irish education [...] between the lingering prerogatives, powers and privileges of a patriarchal era and the emergent attempts to find structures and procedures for the conduct of education in a modern pluralist democracy."

(Hogan 2003, p.11)

Other writers, however, take a less positive view than Hogan (e.g. O’Sullivan, 2005), making the argument that the Convention was more rhetoric than action and that it is an example of the impact of consensualism on policymaking, whereby the need to satisfy so many special interest groups meant that no real alternatives to the status quo were voiced and that any changes arising from it ended up being of the incremental nature outlined earlier.

The varying stances on the NEC reflect an aspect of Irish education that sets it apart from other contexts, which is the level of partnership involved in the development of policy. Social partnership was mooted in education policymaking in the mid-1980s, while Gemma Hussey was minister, and the teacher unions had a significant role in its establishment during the latter years of that decade and into the early 1990s (Gleeson 2010, p. 72). Arising from the partnership model, the teacher unions have a recognised voice in the policymaking process with “strong negotiating and consultancy rights” (Coolahan 2003, p.8). The membership of teacher unions in Ireland at the time was high, with approximately 98% of first-level and 91% of second-level teachers holding membership of one of the three unions (Coolahan 2003). The unions’ strength meant that the partnership model offered a positive channel through which teacher representatives could act in the policymaking process. Walshe characterises Irish policymaking as featuring a “degree of consultation that was probably unique in developed countries” (1999, p.3).

However, while it is positive that education policymaking adopts a social partnership model involving all the stakeholders in the education community, it could be argued that an over-emphasis on consensus can hinder attempts to develop policy with a long-term vision and aim. When decision-making becomes a matter of negotiating agreement amongst a wide number of sectoral interest groups, the opportunity to engage in constructive critique and debate about broad questions of educational philosophy and purposes can be lost in the clamour from too many voices, thus rendering it difficult to achieve anything other than short-term goals. This can mean that, because of a lack of a coherent internal vision, external narratives of education can take hold quite quickly. For example, according to Long, because the “Green Paper 1992 and White Paper 1995 tried to please all interested parties”, the lack of coherence around a clear philosophy of education meant that a “policy window opened for GERM [global education reform movement] type discourses” (2008, p.131).

Nevertheless, while there are valid arguments around the long-term effects of policy decisions taken in the 1990s, it was overall an era of positive change during which equality and inclusion were brought into the centre of educational policymaking. The decade saw the Department of Education issuing circulars making parents partners in education (1991) and banning ability-based school admission policies (1993), introducing alternative curriculum programmes such as the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (1994), abolishing third-level fees in 1995, and legislating for the Education Act (1998). This Act, along with the Employment Equality Act (1998) and the Education Welfare Act (2000), enshrined in law equality of access and non-discrimination as key pillars of the education system.

A final point to make about this decade is that, despite the many positive initiatives around the implementation of alternative curricular programmes, they have not necessarily had the desired long-term effects around the diversification of the mainstream curriculum. There are a number of reasons for this. Many of the more innovative reforms tended to be targeted at a very specific group, often those that found themselves outside the mainstream or who were classed as educationally disadvantaged. Examples of this include the Junior Certificate School Programme (1995) or the Leaving Certificate Applied (1996), both of which did involve new pedagogical methods and a changed teacher/student relationship but which arguably have not gained any real status in comparison to the established courses. The problem with these and other such examples is that they can be used to deflect attention from the fact that the mainstream, as a rule, has made no effort to engage in such progressive change. Another issue is that, when curriculum design projects or assessment reforms are targeted first at minority groupings and in disadvantaged areas, they become somewhat stigmatised. The assumption is reinforced that learning involving real-life experience, continuous assessment and teacher-led evaluation is only for those who are somehow not capable of learning through more traditional pedagogies. The effects of this assumption can still be seen in the recent debate around the reform of the assessment system at lower post-primary level whereby 'high educational standards' becomes synonymous with summative, externally-assessed examinations.

Post-2000: Globalisation, intensification and change fatigue

Continuing in the direction set out by the ‘Investment in Education’ report in the 1960s, the idea of education as the key driver of economic success was the guiding principle at the heart of Irish education policy right through the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond. The direction of education policy in Ireland aligned itself neatly with the growing emphasis globally on the knowledge economy in the twenty-first century. The adoption of discourses of the knowledge economy in Irish education was evident in, for example, the Schools IT2000 project, about which Micheál Martin, the Minister for Education at the time, stated:

“[o]ur objective is to create a high value-added, prosperous, advanced economy. This means that our economic development has to be increasingly knowledge-based.”

(DES 1999)

Ní Chróinín and O’Sullivan characterise the years since the turn of the century as “a period of significant policy change” in education, citing the establishment of the Teaching Council in 2006 and the increasing influence of PISA as examples of this change (2013, p. 453). Ireland was party to the increasing dominance of the international education policy space during this period, during which “the European Commission has taken a more proactive role in educational affairs within the Union”, whereas “[u]p to the nineties the issue of education, as distinct from training, was jealously guarded as the prerogative of the member states” (Coolahan, 2001: 336). According to McDermott *et al.*,

“Ireland’s involvement in the global reform of education is evident from the Irish government’s participation in a number of international policy initiatives, including the publication of ‘Teachers Matter: Attracting Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)’; the work of the EU future objectives group, ‘Improving the Quality and Effectiveness of Education and Training Systems’; and the European network on teacher education policy.”

(McDermott *et al.* 2007, p.240)

It would, however, be too simple to characterise Irish education policy as a straightforward example of the education discourses associated with the knowledge economy and with the global educational reform movement. Rather, while an uncritical acceptance of the human capital paradigm has been a feature of Irish policy, other concepts associated with neoliberal education policy, such as marketisation, privatisation, and accountability, have not gained a strong foothold quite as rapidly as

they have in other contexts, such as the USA and the UK. Of course, this is not to imply that Irish policy is immune to those technologies, simply to point out that there is a need for a more nuanced and contextualised critique of the way those technologies are operating. Some researchers have pointed to this more complex view. For example, Kitching observes that, “Irish education policy has not developed the same technologies of performativity that pervade the US and UK” (2010, p.220), while Kitching *et al.* (2009) point out some particularities in the way in which these discourses are operating in Ireland. They argue that Irish teachers have not experienced quite the same increase in pressure associated with a growth in testing and paperwork as teachers in other jurisdictions, partly because of the strength of the Irish teacher unions.

However, despite these specificities of the Irish context, which could be said to have protected the teaching profession to a certain extent from the more pervasive performativity mechanisms observed in other contexts (Ball 2003), Conway and Murphy (2013) argue that the combination of the ‘rising tide’ of the global education reform movement and the ‘perfect storm’ of Ireland’s economic crisis in 2008 and poor PISA performance in 2009 has led to a deepening of the technologies of accountability and performativity in Irish education. The rise and reframing of accountability can

“be characterised as a ‘rising tide’ due to the interrelated influence of the European higher education space, the range of education legislation at a national level and the consequential impact of professional self-regulation policies [...] emanating from the Teaching Council.”

(Conway & Murphy 2013, p.13)

Conway and Murphy’s observation that accountability discourses were taking firm root in Irish education at around this time is corroborated by the following statement by the then Minister for Education, Ruairí Quinn, in a foreword to an issue of ‘Irish Educational Studies’:

“[t]he strong link between teacher quality and student learning outcomes calls for effective systems of teacher accountability. Assuring teacher quality and facilitating improvement in teachers’ work will best be achieved only when teachers and their organisations claim that responsibility.”

(Quinn 2013, p.8)

A major area of change post-2000 was in teacher education and regulation. Prior to the late 1990s there had been no major change in initial teacher education in almost a century:

“the rules set down by Registration Council for Secondary Teachers in 1918 [...] continue to exert an influence on the key structures of teacher education for second-level teaching.”

(Conway & Murphy 2013, p.12)

However, in line with policy trends internationally, Irish education policy has shown an increased focus on teacher education in recent years. Teacher education is now increasingly characterised as an ongoing continuum in which teachers develop their professional knowledge and skills throughout the course of their careers. In the Irish context, policy initiatives such as the ‘Cosán Framework for Teachers’ Learning’ (Teaching Council 2016) set out criteria according to which teachers are expected to engage in various forms of continuing professional development [CPD]. There is arguably an individualisation of responsibility in such strategies. The emphasis strategies of this kind place on continuous self-improvement can be linked to the global operation of neoliberal discourses of individualisation and competition (Brine 2006). Conway (2013, p.59) notes that there has been a steady increase in research on teacher education, and on initial teacher education in particular. The impact of competition and rankings across all sectors of education can be seen in education policy that is concerned with issues of standards and accountability in initial teacher education.

In the context of post-primary education in Ireland, this has meant a restructuring of initial teacher education [ITE], such that the qualification for teaching is now the 2-year Professional Master of Education, rather than the one year Postgraduate Diploma in Education. This change has coincided with a requirement for institutions offering ITE to adhere to stricter guidelines regarding course content. There have also been calls for a restructuring of the ITE sector as a whole, in order to improve the standard of education provided and to ensure that all ITE courses have a firm foundation in university-based education theory and research.

The influence of European-level discourses around teacher professionalism can be traced in the establishment of the Teaching Council in 2006. Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act 2001 makes registration with the Teaching Council compulsory for teachers. This requirement was implemented from 2014 onwards (Teaching Council

2015). The Council's new regulations for initial teacher education and professional conduct represent a move towards professionalism or, as some have argued, deprofessionalisation. Some of the principal aims of the Council since its establishment include establishing a register of teachers, establishing a professional code of conduct, reviewing initial teacher education, establishing induction procedures, creating a framework for CPD and establishing a system whereby fitness-to-teach inquiries could be held (Teaching Council 2016; 2015; Lawlor 2011 *cited by* Conway 2013). Conway argues that this body of work "highlighted the professionalisation discourse underpinning the range of initiatives that have carved out a new landscape for the profession" (2013, p.61).

An alternative view could suggest that, rather than it being an example of the deprofessionalisation discourse, the Teaching Council's establishment could be seen to be bringing a much-needed professionalism to Irish teaching through addressing some deeply embedded cultural and structural weaknesses in the system. As mentioned earlier, one of the key pillars of policy around teacher professionalism is to improve teacher effectiveness through reflective practice and collaborative learning. The Teaching Council in Ireland appear to be embracing this sentiment with their drive towards fostering a spirit of research amongst teachers. The Council's aims in this regard echo what Sachs describes;

"[a]t the core of this activity are new forms of reciprocity between teachers and academics and other education stakeholders whereby both groups come to understand the nature and limitations of each other's work and perspectives."

(Sachs 2001, p.153)

There are however structural and cultural barriers to the development of such a practice in Ireland. Structurally, given the context in terms of working conditions, it is difficult to envisage how their attempts will be interpreted as anything other than another aspect of Apple's 'intensification' thesis. The international cultural norms of teaching can be seen to work against this kind of collaborative practice, as Coburn *et al.* observe,

"occupational norms of privacy work against teachers seeking out others [...] In this environment, seeking out others to talk about teaching and learning involves considerable risk: risk of violating norms, risk of exposing teaching problems (Little 1990)."

(Coburn *et al.* 2013, p.313)

They comment that, when teachers do interact, it tends to be in superficial ways, with a focus on resource sharing. This occupational norm is particularly strong in the Irish context, as confirmed in the TALIS 2008 study where Irish teachers reported low levels of professional collaboration (OECD 2009).

Coolahan was optimistic about the founding of the Teaching Council, saying that “[t]he establishment of the Teaching Council in the first year of the new century would be a powerful symbolic testimony to public regard for the teaching profession” (2001, pp.363-364). Hogan sounds an equally optimistic note about the Teaching Council’s potential:

“[it] furnishes opportunities of truly historic proportions [...] The composition of the Council itself and of its major committees, the range of the Council's powers and those of the committees, provide the clearest indication yet of a decisive shift in the balance of power among the major parties in Irish schooling.”

(Hogan 2003, p.13)

However, in many cases teachers did not perceive it in this way, due perhaps to a sense of reform fatigue during this period and also to the dominant understanding of autonomy as not being subject to oversight (Gleeson 2010).

The establishment of the Teaching Council came shortly before a fall in Ireland’s PISA ranking and an ensuing debate around teacher professionalism and teaching standards. A combination of factors in the late 2000s led to an increased focus on teacher professionalism in Irish education policy and discourse. These included the publication of the OECD’s report ‘Teachers Matter’ (2005) and the McKinsey report ‘How the World’s Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better’ (2010) whose central message is that, “teacher quality is the single most important within-school factor influencing student learning” (Conway 2013, p.51). Add to these reports the policy crisis created by Ireland’s fall in the 2009 PISA league tables and a clear policy impetus emerged towards improving teaching and teacher education standards.

This crisis of confidence in the education system came after years of public contentment with the standard of education in Ireland, with a dominant narrative claiming that the country’s world-class education system contributed to an excellent workforce that attracted inward investment and created economic growth. The sudden shattering of this illusion, coming at the same time as an economic recession, constructed a ‘cultural flashpoint’ or ‘perfect storm’ in Irish education (Looney 2014; Conway 2013). Interestingly, this was the first example of a media and public outcry

around a teaching crisis, a situation that is “in stark contrast to the more overt teaching crises and associated educational reform in some other jurisdictions” (Conway 2013, p. 55). Hogan traces the turn in the public perception of teaching to the late 1990s and early 2000s, attributing the turn in part to some badly-judged industrial actions by the ASTI union [Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland] but mainly to the fact that

“higher levels of education and awareness in the population at large mean that there is now a greater readiness than in former times to challenge the actions of professionals of all kinds, including teachers.”

(Hogan 2003, p.14)

Other key policy moments from this time period include the introduction of the school evaluation policy Looking At Our Schools, the introduction of a new curriculum and assessment programme for the Junior Cycle of post-primary school, and the changes to pay and working conditions following the 2008 economic recession and the ensuing Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009.

Looking At Our Schools was introduced in 2003/04 and updated in 2016 (DES 2016a). Its implementation framework included Whole School Evaluations [WSE], involving visits to schools and classrooms from external inspectors, and School Self-Evaluations [SSE], involving school-based accountability and assessment metrics. While there had historically been a system of centralised inspection administered by a division of the DES, a number of industrial tensions had led by the 1990s to a situation whereby

“the inspection of primary schools had become sporadic and rather idiosyncratic; in secondary schools, inspection had nearly ceased entirely. The largest teacher union supported its members in refusing to teach in front of an inspector.”

(McNamara & O’Hara 2012, p.3)

This context meant that the evaluation process and the accountability measures it represents was for many second-level teachers their first experience of any kind of inspection or evaluation since leaving initial teacher education. The introduction of School Self-Evaluation [SSE] from 2003 onwards is an example of a reform where there was an absence of informed discussion about the aims and purposes of the plan. Welcoming its arrival at the time, Hogan suggested that:

“the professional authorship of the process lies decisively before the hands of teachers. That there are new responsibilities associated with this [...] is itself a long delayed recognition of a major point: that teaching is a profession with an office and an integrity of its own within a pluralist democracy, as distinct from being a subordinate

occupation to be carried on only under the surveillance of a higher authority, such as Church or state.”

(Hogan 2003, p.13)

However, it was not perceived in this way universally and, indeed, SSE and the associated Whole School Evaluation [WSE] has come to be seen as a ‘box-ticking’ exercise and an example of top-down performative control.

At the time of the fieldwork phase of this study, there was an ongoing industrial action by the second-level teaching unions in protest against the introduction of the Junior Cycle curriculum reform. The reform had been mooted in 2009 and, broadly, was to involve a move from a summative, centralised, externally-examined system of assessment towards a classroom-based, teacher-evaluated system of continuous assessment. Following a protracted dispute which led to the teaching unions organising a number of strike days in 2015, a compromise was found and a programme comprising both externally and internally evaluated assessment was implemented on a gradual basis from September 2015 (NCCA 2015).

Another key aspect of the Irish educational context in recent years involves the changes which were made to pay and employment conditions across the public sector under what is known as FEMPI [Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009], in response to the 2008 economic recession. The measures in the FEMPI Act resulted in an average fall of 7% in teachers’ salaries and 4% in pension payments between January 2010 and January 2012 (ASTI n.d.). This led to a number of early retirements at this time, as those who retired before February 2012 were eligible to have their end-of-employment lump sum payment paid on the basis of their pre-cut salary. In other measures under the Act, allowances that had been paid to teachers on top of their salaries for additional academic qualifications were suspended for teachers entering the profession from 2012 onwards. Alongside this cut, post-2011 entrants to teaching are now paid on a salary scale with a starting point that is 10% lower than that of their colleagues (DES 2011a), a measure which is the subject of ongoing negotiations between the teacher unions and government.

A further change to working conditions which has been the cause of much dispute is an addition of 33 hours to the annual mandatory working hours, introduced in 2011. These hours were designated as whole-school planning hours and the purposes for which they could be used was tightly restricted. Their introduction was resisted because

they were perceived as implying that teachers did not already work additional hours beyond their allocated teaching hours. At the time of the debate around these hours, there was reference made to the fact that the second-level teaching year in Ireland is among the lowest in the OECD, at 167 days per annum. Despite this however, the actual teaching time per teacher at second-level in Ireland is above the OECD average, at 775 hours per annum, compared to 648 hours for upper-second and 720 hours for lower-second across the OECD (Coolahan 2003, pp. 72-73).

These additional 33 working hours were introduced under the measures of the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 (known as the Croke Park Agreement), which was superseded by the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2016 (known as the Haddington Road Agreement). The parts of these agreements relating to the education sector were negotiated between the teacher unions, school management bodies, and the government. The Croke Park Agreement guaranteed that there would be no further cuts to existing teacher salaries, that there would be no compulsory redundancies and that teachers' retirement lump sum payments would be based on their pre-cut salary if they retired before February 2012. In return, the teacher unions agreed to teachers providing an extra 33 hours work annually, providing an extra period of supervision or substitution duty weekly, providing cover in the case of teachers being absent due to class trips, and participating in a redeployment scheme for teachers surplus to a school's requirements (DES 2013; 2010). The Agreement was perceived as protecting existing teachers at the expense of their future colleagues, as new entrants to teaching post-2011 were not protected from pay cuts and have been subject to the 10% cut mentioned above. While the teacher unions have since then been involved in an ongoing campaign to restore this pay cut and end the pay disparity, the positive perception of the teacher unions has arguably been negatively affected, amongst newer entrants to teaching at least.

Another issue that has made teaching a financially less attractive career choice in recent years is that, in tandem with the cost-saving measures outlined, there has been an increase in casualisation and precarity of employment within the teaching profession. This means in practice that teachers who entered the profession post-2011 are not only on a reduced salary scale but, in many cases, are not employed full-time and are paid pro-rata. The author of a 2014 report commissioned by the Minister for Education on employment practices in the teaching profession states that

“matters have now reached a point where there is a danger that the teaching profession in Ireland will be downgraded and that the lack of full-time and secure positions operates as a significant disincentive to those considering entering the profession. There has, as a consequence, also been a loss of morale in the sector. It is clear that the ability of the Irish education system to attract the highest calibre of graduates is undermined by the absence of a viable career path combined with security of employment.”

(Ward Report 2014, p.7)

6. Conclusion

The educational context in which this study is set and in which the research participants teach is one shaped by each of the themes and issues discussed. An increasingly internationalised education policy sphere sets a backdrop in which national education systems are informed by the discourses of the global knowledge economy. These discourses contribute to the strengthening of policy trends around an outcomes-based model of education based on standardisation, evaluation, and measurement. A key policy trope within this international sphere is the concept of teacher professionalism. Policy critique, however, suggests that the contemporary rhetoric of teacher professionalism, wherein it is primarily linked to teacher efficacy and effectiveness, is more reminiscent of deprofessionalisation, particularly in terms of the emphasis on performativity and accountability mechanisms.

The contemporary national context of Irish education, then, cannot be isolated from these international educational discourses and, certainly, teacher efficacy has moved more centrally into the public debate around education in Ireland in recent years. Similarly, the focus of the globalised knowledge economy is a nodal point in Irish education policy and international policy actors such as the OECD are influential in the policy process. However, education in the Irish context does not merely mirror that in other contexts but has its own particularities. The contemporary issues in second-level education in Ireland are rooted in a national historical narrative in which the guiding philosophies of education were shaped by the dominant societal and cultural position of the Catholic Church. Education change over the first 60 years of the State was gradual, piecemeal and lacking in a coherent educational narrative. As the country's economy

became more outward-looking and as the Church's influence waned from the 1980s onwards, the guiding philosophies of education shifted to align themselves with the rapidly accelerating global knowledge economy and the associated human capital and mercantile paradigms.

The teachers in this study started their careers just as this intense period of education change, related to the economic and social changes, was beginning. Through the 1990s and into recent decades, the pace of education reform increased and the hitherto high social status of the profession became less secure as educational attainment rates improved drastically and private sector salaries outgrew those of the public sector. The strong negotiating voice of the teacher unions provided for by the partnership approach to government has meant that some of the more pervasive effects of the neoliberalisation of education observed internationally have not affected the teaching profession in Ireland (for example, there have been no performance-related pay initiatives). However, while teachers in Ireland do continue to enjoy relatively high salaries and good working conditions in comparison to other contexts, the period since 2000 has seen a number of industrial disputes, two of them prolonged, and the perception of a drop in morale and professional contentment. Initiatives such as the establishment of the Teaching Council were perceived in some quarters as a mark of the high regard for teachers and a conformation of their professional status but in others as ushering in a new level of bureaucratisation and an imposition of oversight. The current national context, then, is one marked by flux, uncertainty and a sense, arguably, of the end of an era of Irish teachers' "legendary autonomy" (Sugrue 2006; OECD 1991). This study locates itself within this fluid and complex context and, through engaging with the teacher identity narratives of experienced teachers, looks to develop a nuanced understanding of what it is to be a teacher in the contemporary moment.

The next chapter, Chapter Three, reviews the empirical and theoretical literature that informs the study's conceptual, theoretical, and methodological frameworks. Building on the concepts introduced in the current chapter, it discusses some of the key themes and issues in the international and national literature on teacher identity and the intersections of education policy processes with teacher identity. It also discusses the study's key theoretical influences and explains how the work of Adriana Cavarero and of Judith Butler has shaped the study's theoretical orientation and methodological approach.

Chapter 3

Literature Review: Teacher Identity and Theoretical Framework

1. Introduction

Teacher identity is a complex concept, one for which there are numerous interpretations and definitions throughout the literature. Part of the reason for this complexity is of course that identity itself has long been a complex and contested concept in the social sciences. Furthermore, teacher identity encompasses not only the multiple interpretations of identity but also the varying understandings of teaching that include questions around its status as a profession. Given that the concept is so multidimensional, it was beyond the scope of this study to examine teacher identity in all its variations. This is because the study focuses on the aspects of teacher identity that emerged from the interviews as playing a key role in the research participants' narratives of teacher identity. This approach reflects the study's methodological commitment to openness and uncertainty in that it was only during the fieldwork phase that it became clear where the focus of the study's exploration of teacher identity would lie. The core concepts which form the basis for this study's analysis of teacher identity are thus autonomy, accountability, relationality, agency, and vulnerability.

This review of the literature will begin by outlining the rationale for the study of teacher identity and gives an overview of how it is defined and understood in the international literature. It will then highlight some of the key themes and issues within the field of teacher identity research that are particularly relevant to this study. These themes are those that emerged during the fieldwork phase, as pointed out above, and also those that are relevant to the study's international and national context, as outlined in Chapter Two. It also develops the discussion in Chapter Two of teacher professionalism as policy discourse with an examination of its operation in terms of teacher identity, particularly in terms of the reframing in policy discourse of 'teaching' as the 'facilitation of learning' (Biesta 2015a; 2015b). The following section discusses the literature that looks at the intersection of education policy and teacher identity and

highlights some key concepts that the literature focuses on, such as policy enactment (Maguire *et al.* 2015; Braun *et al.* 2011). In this area, the literature that draws attention to the interplay of education change with affect and vulnerability is of particular relevance to the study (Lasky 2005). Finally, the chapter concludes with a review of the literature that informs the study's theoretical framework and a discussion of how the theoretical concepts within this literature are operationalised in the context of the study.

2. Teacher Identity: Professional, Personal, and Political

This study aligns itself with the argument that, “teachers’ identity is an important influence on teaching and learning” (Zembylas & Chubbuck 2014) and is a core component of teachers’ practice. As such, teacher identity plays a key role in students’ educational experiences and outcomes. As Day points out, teacher identity is “arguably central to sustaining motivation, efficacy, commitment, job satisfaction, and effectiveness” (Day 2002, p.677). Research on teacher identity should encompass both professional and personal identities, since

“the teacher is so critical to student learning, [that] we cannot fully understand educational impact without getting a sense of a teacher's personal experiences.”

(LaBoskey 2006, p.118)

The rapidly growing field of inquiry into teacher emotions and affect is located at this intersection between the personal and the professional and brings valuable nuance and complexity to the concept of teacher identity. Furthermore, in addition to the professional and the personal, there must be a focus on the political in research on teacher identity, given the ambiguous status of teaching and the way in which the profession is often positioned as a policy ‘problem’ (Thompson & Cook 2014; Ball & Olmedo 2013). Indeed, these three spheres, the professional, the personal, and the political can be viewed as mutually constitutive within the construction of teacher identity.

There is a common understanding of identity running through the literature on teacher identity, whereby identity is viewed as a fluid construct rather than as a fixed essence of being. This ongoing process of integration of prior understanding with present experience continues throughout one’s life. This study broadly adopts this

perspective on identity but with some specificities, which will be discussed in the section on the theoretical framework. It is informed in its understanding of teacher identity by Zembylas and Chubbuck (2014), in particular their attention to the political dimension:

“[t]eacher identity [...], then, is understood as a dynamic, career-long process of negotiating the teacher-self in relation to personal and emotional experiences, the professional and social context, and the micro and macro political environment.”

(Zembylas & Chubbuck 2014, p.174)

Teacher identity is thus not simply a product of external influences but must be examined as an ongoing negotiation of identities that is a fluid and dynamic process. This process involves interactions across three different spheres: 1) the micro-level; 2) the meso-level; and 3) the macro-level. For the purposes of this study, the micro-level represents the individual or self, the meso-level represents the school and community, and the macro-level represents broader society, including concepts such as policy, discourse and governance.

The intensification (Apple 1996) and deprofessionalisation of teacher identity cannot be set aside from wider political contexts. An understanding of teacher identity must extend beyond the role of ‘teacher’ and encompass the broader shifts undergoing our understandings of ‘identity’ and ‘professional identity’. In this, the boundaries between the personal and the professional are increasingly blurred as the affective sphere is co-opted into an ongoing project of improvement of the self (Han 2017). In this concept of the self, the economic is central, although the focus is not on structural conditions of employment but on the individual within those structures. Success or failure are attributed wholly to the individual’s capacity to use their agency responsibly and wisely. Failure and vulnerability, where present, must be overcome and the experience reframed to become an illustration of the individual’s fortitude and resilience (Mulhall 2016).

In terms of professional identity, this means that the individual must simultaneously bring more of the personal to the professional, by engaging in an ongoing process of renewal and adaptation, while also, and paradoxically, stifling the personal by only exhibiting those traits and characteristics that are deemed acceptable within the discourse of professionalism. This blurring of boundaries between the professional and the personal, and the associated responsabilisation of the individual,

brings the political to the fore in terms of understanding identity. In conceptualising the political within the study of identity, this study is informed by the understanding of the political space as a space of action or agency (Cavarero 2000; Arendt 1958). The framing of teacher identity as involving the professional, the personal, and the political means that attention is drawn to the need to allow the space within teacher identity for the political agency with which to negotiate the challenges of the blurring of professional and personal outlined above.

The concept of teacher identity is approached and defined in different ways in the educational research literature. For example, some studies start with a focus on the self and on the ways in which a teacher's self-identity shapes their professional identity and their teaching practice. Other studies start with a focus on the role and examine how perceptions of the role of 'teacher' shape individual teacher identities. However, if there is some agreement emerging from the literature around a definition of teacher identity, it is that teacher identity is made up of some combination of self-image, values, beliefs, knowledge, and context (Imants *et al.* 2013; Beauchamp & Thomas 2009; Watson 2006; Beijaard *et al.* 2004). In terms of theoretical influence, the symbolic interactionist and the poststructuralist schools of thought dominate much of the teacher identity literature, with feminist theory and, in particular, feminist poststructuralism becoming increasingly influential in the field in recent decades. The increase in research using feminist theoretical perspectives offers a greater focus on individual difference in the construction of identity, while still accounting for the role of context. For example, Braun's (2011) analysis of student teachers' identity construction shows that "teachers' and students' histories and positioning, as well as wider social and cultural contexts, are part of every learning situation" (p. 288). This idea of identity as individual positionings that are nevertheless bound by socially and culturally determined parameters is one that aligns itself with this study's theoretical orientation and will be further discussed in the final sections of this chapter.

Beijaard *et al.* (2004) undertook a comprehensive review of the literature on teacher identity, where they grouped the reviewed studies according to three types or topics of investigation: a focus on initial formation of teacher identity by student and novice teachers; a focus on the characteristics of teacher identity as identified by research participants and researchers; and a focus on teacher identity as represented by stories told by and about teachers. Based on developments in the field since Beijaard's

2004 paper, it is useful to add a further two groupings to this rubric, namely: a focus on the role of emotions in teacher identity; and a focus on the role of discourse in teacher identity. The current study encompasses the latter three groupings, as it focuses on stories of teacher identity and, as the findings chapters will discuss, the operation of emotions and of discourse within these stories.

As discussed in Chapter Two, there has been a marked global trend in education policy towards improving teacher quality, with an increased focus on the recruitment, education, and professional development of teachers. However, as the literature on education change argues, unless policymakers take account of teacher identity, change is not likely to be deep, effective, or sustainable (Flores & Day 2006; Day 2002; Hargreaves 2005; Van Veen *et al.* 2005). Teacher identity plays an important role in deciding not only the success of education change, but also its form and effects. This is because teachers actively interpret and redefine education policies and reforms according to their own professional values and understandings. In interpreting reforms, teachers “look for cohesion between the content of the reinvented reform and the enacted characteristics of the work environment in which the reform is introduced” (Imants *et al.* 2013, p.325).

The role of emotions is central to teacher identity, given that teaching can be seen as an occupation that involves what Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983) terms ‘emotional labour’. There can be a tendency for teachers, as O’Connor (2008) observes, to create an artificial persona to avoid becoming too emotionally involved in and invested in their work. Another tendency is for teachers to “so closely merge their sense of personal and professional identity that the classroom becomes a main site for their self-esteem and fulfilment” (Nias 1996, p.297). Both of these tendencies, the constant performance of a persona and the merging of personal and professional selves, require considerable emotional labour to maintain. This is especially so when there is a threat to the teacher’s sense of professional identity, at times of reform or at particular career stages for example (Santoro 2013; 2011). As Day *et al.* (2005) note, teachers hold three selves simultaneously; the actual and the ideal, and the transitional that mediates between the two. Where there is a change to either the actual or the ideal self, the emotional effort required to mediate between the two is increased and can lead to feelings of uncertainty, self-doubt, and vulnerability. Autonomy, “a sense of control over one’s environment” (Imants *et al.* 2013, p.328), and vulnerability can thus be seen as

two sides of a delicate balance. In this understanding of the intersection of vulnerability and autonomy, teachers' emotions are not "private reactive responses" (Zembylas 2005, p.936) but are, rather, experiences mediated by context and can thus be viewed as "structural conditions" (Kelchtermans 2005). An understanding of teacher professional identity must then take into account the social and cultural contexts within which teachers' emotional experiences take place.

Drawing on these various perspectives and emphases within the literature on teacher identity offers an understanding of how the concept is located at the intersection of the personal, the professional, and the political spheres, each of which interacts with the other in the process of teacher identity construction. Understanding teacher identity as a negotiation or balancing of these spheres brings attention to its fluid and complex nature, whereby the various spheres will at times complement each other and at other times be at odds. This study anchors itself within this perspective of teacher identity to argue for a renewed focus on an ethical professionalism, not only because of its inherent worth, but as a means to negotiate the challenges faced by the teaching profession in the current political climate which tests the boundaries of the spheres of the personal, the professional, and the political. The next sections will highlight some of the key themes within the empirical and theoretical research literature on the concept of teacher identity, so as to provide a grounding for the discussion of the study's findings which forms the second part of the dissertation.

3. Understanding Teacher Identity: Key Themes in the Literature

Sustaining identities: the life-course perspective

Although there are obvious exceptions (e.g. Santoro 2017; Day *et al.* 2006; Hargreaves 2005), there is nevertheless a tendency in the research on teacher identity to focus on student and early-career teachers. This tendency is particularly marked in the Irish context. Other than a 2016 study by Mooney Simmie on experienced teachers' interpretations of 'good teaching', there is a distinct lack of recent literature on second-level teacher identity relating to mid- and late-career teachers in the Irish context. Research on the identity of student and newly qualified teachers dominates the Irish literature, addressing in particular such issues as emerging teacher identities and

demographics and diversity in teacher education (e.g. Byrne & Murray *forthcoming*; Harford & Gray 2017; Heinz *et al.* 2017; Keane & Heinz 2015; Kenny *et al.* 2015; O’Grady 2015; Furlong 2013; Conway *et al.* 2012; Sugrue 1997). Where there is research on more experienced teachers, it has tended to focus on their experiences around particular policy moments (Mooney Simmie *et al.* 2016) or pedagogical issues (Looney *et al.* 2017), rather than teacher identity as a broader concept. Thus, as stated in the introduction, one of the aims of this study is to address this disparity by examining the teacher identity narratives of mid- to late-career teachers in the Irish context.

Of course, the emphasis across the national and international literature on early-career teachers is understandable given the importance of this stage of identity development in the process of acquiring pedagogical and experiential knowledge and skills and the mediation of that process with the product of prior understandings and influences. It is also possible that access plays a role in the predominance of early-career research, as faculty in teacher education institutes are more likely to have links with teachers at this stage of their careers than with teachers who may have left university 20 to 30 years ago.

However, it is essential that research on teacher identity encompasses the entire life-course of the teaching career. This wider view can offer an understanding of the changes that occur in a teacher’s professional self as they progress through their career and can highlight the ‘critical events’ in a teacher’s career. Woods (1993, p.447) defines these as “peaks within the teacher’s pedagogical career that sustain vision, restore faith, equip teachers for ‘strategic redefinition’”. Of course, critical events are not just ‘peaks’ but can also be negative experiences that lead to increased vulnerability, as discussed by Van Veen *et al.* (2005) in the case of David, a veteran teacher who has become increasingly disillusioned after a number of failed education reform attempts about which he had originally been enthusiastic. Furthermore, as well as the life-course perspective illustrating the flow of the teaching life, this perspective can draw on the valuable insights that experienced teachers can bring to the educational contexts in which they have spent their professional lives. This is particularly so at times of education reform or unrest, when focusing on experienced or veteran teachers’ voices allows researchers to develop an understanding of the historical and cultural background to professional discontent or change resistance. As Santoro puts it when discussing the resignation letters of experienced teachers, “[t]he concerns that they raise about the

profession are not the laments of wide-eyed idealists who encounter the reality of schools for the first time” (2017, p. 758). A life-course perspective on teacher identity allows for an exploration of the narrative of a teacher’s professional self and may highlight the manner in which that narrative might develop from the ‘wide-eyed idealism’ of new entrants to the disillusioned veteran who feels that resignation is the only morally just option.

One of the most influential works on teacher identity to use a life-course perspective is Michael Huberman’s ‘The Lives of Teachers’ (1989; 1993). Based on a study of 160 Swiss teachers, he divides the teaching career into 7 stages; career entry, stabilisation, experimentation and diversification, reassessment, serenity and relational distance, conservatism and complaints, and disengagement. Passage through these stages is not necessarily linear and not every teacher will pass through every phase. In addition, the experiencing of the stages can be ‘serene’ or ‘bitter’. Day *et al.* (2006) include Huberman’s work in their list of “the most authoritative studies of teachers’ career experiences” (p. 174), along with Sikes *et al.* (1985) on English teachers and Fessler and Christensen (1992) on US teachers. Other researchers adopting a life-course perspective include Hargreaves (2005) and Cooper and Davey (2011). Each of these studies suggests a path of career phases that is more or less similar to that identified by Huberman and highlights the importance of the transitions from early to mid-career and from mid to late-career in determining whether a teacher will sustain high levels of engagement and motivation.

Of particular interest to this study are the questions that emerge from the literature around experience, affect, and teacher identity. As Huberman highlights with his description of career transitions as either “serene” or “bitter”, the literature points to the complexity of capturing the lived experience of veteran teachers, as those experiences differ so vastly in qualitative terms. The literature also emphasises the complex and, at times, contradictory arguments around whether experience and effectiveness are positively correlated. The point is made that, for many teachers in mid-to-late career there is “a progressive sense of inconsequentiality” (Farber 1991) and that this, along with low self-esteem and shame at not achieving desired results, can be “directly correlated with less variety of teaching approaches and thus less connection with students’ learning needs” (Day *et al.* 2006, p.174).

On the other hand, however, Beijaard *et al.* (2000) observe that, in research on the influence of teacher experience, it is assumed that “experienced teachers are (at least to a large extent) also expert teachers” (p. 753). In a quantitative longitudinal study examining the correlation between teacher experience and student outcomes, Ladd and Sorensen (2017) found a strong positive correlation. Their definition of ‘outcomes’ was holistic, extending beyond test scores to include what they call ‘non-cognitive indicators’ such as number of days absent, number of reported disruptive classroom offences, and amount of time spent reading for pleasure. The positive correlation between experience and outcomes was particularly strong in the case of student absenteeism. Given that much of the teacher life-course research is qualitative in nature, Ladd and Sorensen’s quantitative work adds a useful extra dimension to the understanding of the teaching life-course.

There are different ways to characterise mid to late-career teachers who resist reform and change and it is important to consider the reasons behind the resistance. Hargreaves (2005) describes a particular type of late-career teacher, the ‘negative focuser’:

“[a]s they age and gain increased formal or informal influence, they are able to marshal increased micropolitical resources to find the easiest schedules and students, and to find ways to resist and undermine the change and improvement efforts that threaten them. Negative focusers are the archetypal examples of resistance to change, the bane of administrators’ lives.”

(Hargreaves 2005, p.974)

However, this does not describe all teachers who resist change. Some of these teachers may be more accurately described as ‘disenchanted’. This group, according to Hargreaves, have in the past been enthusiastic and have often committed themselves to reforms but,

“the magic of teaching has literally gone as their optimism and idealism have been crashed on the rocks of capricious reform processes, repetitive change syndromes (Abrahamson, 2004), and successions of leaders with serially contradictory visions.”

(Hargreaves 2005, p.975)

Hargreaves points out that this group are often the most vociferous opponents of educational reform. This type of opposition is often misinterpreted as intransigence, recalcitrance, or passivity (Van Veen *et al.* 2005, p.931) where it could in fact be more usefully described as “conscientious objection” (Santoro 2017; 2013). As the study by

Van Veen *et al.* shows, it can be the case that it is the most enthusiastic teachers who become most worn down by negative experiences of reforms into which they have invested a great deal of their professional and personal selves. They argue that “[m]ore explicit attention should be paid to notions of work overload as a factor in growing emotional negativity and decline in commitment or satisfaction” (2005, p.931).

These observations about the multifaceted reasons for resisting change are relevant in terms of the teacher identity narratives of the research participants in this study. The openness of the research methodology allowed for the nuance of the teachers’ positions to be explored in a way that highlights the uniqueness of each teacher’s experience. Policy discourse which fails to allow for the complexity of change resistance risks further entrenching feelings of disillusionment and change fatigue, whereas taking these factors into account in work around policy implementation and enactment may provide for more mutually beneficial outcomes.

Intergenerational differences in change openness is a further point of interest that is discussed in the literature on contemporary teacher identity. Hargreaves observes that the new generation of teachers “is more flexible, adaptable, accepting and even enthusiastic in its dealings with educational and other kinds of change” (2005, p.972). It is difficult to see, however, how it could be established that the older generation of teachers were not themselves enthusiastically open to change as younger teachers. A resistance to change is possibly something that developed gradually as they progressed through their careers, as in Huberman’s work for example.

Narrative perspectives on teacher identity

Amongst the various perspectives found in the literature on teacher identity, the narrative perspective is one of the primary influences for this study. Clandinin and Connelly, perhaps the most influential theorists within this field in education research, define narrative as “the making of meaning from personal experience via a process of reflection in which storytelling is the key element” (1990, p.11). Examining teacher identity from a narrative perspective aligns itself well with the aims of this study and with its theoretical orientation. This is because it allows for an understanding of identity as an ongoing negotiation and storying of the contextualised self. From a narrative perspective, teacher identity can be understood as a search for a coherent narrative that

weaves through one's career and takes into account the three spheres of the personal, the professional and the political.

Narrative theory has been used in the Irish educational literature, for example in studies on Physical Education [PE] (Casey & Schaefer 2016; Enright & O'Sullivan 2010), and on adult education (Mulhall 2016). However, the literature using narrative theory tends to focus on sectors other than mainstream second-level, or on specific themes within the mainstream (i.e. PE). Where research from a narrative perspective does focus on teacher identity, it tends to involve research on student and newly qualified teachers, as is the case with the life-course perspective discussed above. A recent special issue of the Irish Educational Studies journal draws attention to the growth of the narrative inquiry research community in the Irish context (O'Grady *et al.* 2018; Todd 2018).

The idea of identity as an ongoing process of negotiation comes to the fore in the work of Clandinin and Connelly. In their research on professional knowledge landscapes, they argue that teachers experience and negotiate the “epistemological dilemmas” of the profession through the use of “teacher stories” (1996, p.24). These stories take place in two different spaces in the professional landscape. One is the classroom, where teaching traditionally happens behind closed doors with just the teacher and students present. The other is the more public space where teachers negotiate their professional identity with and through others, be they colleagues in the staffroom or discursive arenas such as education policy, the media or universities. The ways in which teachers negotiate and maintain a coherent professional identity in and between these spaces can be understood through the concept of three types of story: the sacred story, the secret story and the cover story. The sacred story is that which involves

“those ‘theory-driven views of practice’ produced by policy-makers, administrators, theoreticians and others, that teachers feel are pushed on them, prescribed and imposed from outside.”

(*ibid*, p.24)

The secret story is the story of the classroom, where teachers practice their profession often in isolation and away from scrutiny. They might be shared with other teachers but they nonetheless take place in a private sphere. The cover story is “told by teachers to portray themselves as experts, as characters that fit what is acceptable in the story of the school” (1996, p.25). Cover stories enable a teacher to sustain their practice where their

secret story does not fit with the school's story or with the sacred story of the current policy context. Clandinin and Connelly do not offer a value judgement on teachers' use of these types of stories - while they could be used to conceal unsatisfactory practice they could equally be used to sustain a teacher's value-based practice where there is a risk that a policy directive might attempt to force practice in another direction.

Clandinin and Connelly emphasise the important role of these stories in sustaining teachers' professional identities. Woods makes a similar observation in reference to the use of story by the teachers in his life history study; "[t]hey initiated the life histories, and it was clear that that kind of reflective activity was not new to them, and that it was part of their armoury in sustaining the self" (1993, p.451). The use of the word 'armoury' is interesting here and certainly evokes something of the 'cover story'. Another form of the cover story is observed by Cohen, who states that

"in constructing professional identities, teachers may paint oppositional portraits describing who they are not, and in the process implicitly delineate who they are or how they would like to be seen."

(Cohen 2008, p.83)

Clandinin and Connelly make the point that it is not the teachers' actions or beliefs that make it necessary for them to maintain cover stories but the fact that sacred stories are often imposed on teachers with little regard to the professional knowledge landscapes in which they are already working. Kelchtermans also draws attention to the way in which public perception can influence teacher identity; "teaching is a social and public act where the ideas the teacher has about his/herself are influenced by what others think about him/her" (*cited in* Peiser & Jones 2014, p.380). The current study builds on these ideas around teacher identity as an entwining of internal stories of the self with external narratives in an ongoing process of negotiation throughout the teaching life-course.

The narrative perspective gained much traction internationally in education research through the later 90s and into the 2000s and, indeed, reflective storying is now increasingly recommended as a tool in initial teacher education [ITE] and continuing professional development [CPD] (e.g. Nelson 2008; Day & Leitch 2001). The value of the narrative approach is in the insights it can offer into the process of identity construction and in its contextualisation of knowledge. According to Sachs (2001), stories, in the form of 'self-narrative', have an essential role to play in defining and renewing teacher professionalism. She argues that these stories, when made public, can

provide opportunities for teachers to communicate with each other and can “give rise to a more active, spirited debate about policy and practice” (2001, p.158). Indeed, such exchange at the individual and collective levels can have “clear emancipatory objectives” (*ibid*). Of course, there is little emancipatory about a forced engagement in producing self-narratives, which, it could be argued, is what has emerged from the current emphasis in teacher education and CPD on the ‘reflective practitioner’, whereby ‘reflexivity’ is arguably positioned as a panacea to the myriad challenges involved in the development of teacher professionalism. Indeed, some theorists have voiced doubts about the uncritical manner in which the concept of the ‘reflective practitioner’ has been adopted across teacher education, arguing that there is a lack of nuance and an element of superficiality in some of these practices (e.g. Beauchamp 2015, McGarr & McCormack 2014). A further issue with this notion of the reflective practitioner as a solution to the challenge of maintaining a positive sense of professional identity is that it can operate as a decontextualised concept, where the focus is taken away from structural and organisational issues and placed on the teacher’s personal disposition. In other words, an overemphasis on the reflective practitioner individualises the responsibility for negotiating challenges that may have their roots in contextual factors and it presumes that, in the process of reflection, “teachers’ possible responses are unlimited and unencumbered” (Santoro 2011, p.9).

The issue of subjectivity in the narrative approach is addressed by Watson (2006), who makes the point that, in using a narrative approach to explore teacher identity, she is not aiming to get at the ‘truth’ of a particular teaching life but “to focus on practices of teaching that provide insights into the processes involved in the construction of professional identity” (2006, p.513). This position towards the concept of subjectivity is taken up by the current study, which acknowledges the impossibility of capturing objectively ‘true’ stories of teaching. The study is interested rather in the processes of how ‘truth’ as a negotiated concept operates in the identity narratives of individual teachers and in the contextualised nature of these truths. This perspective is informed by LaBoskey (2006), who states that, “stories can contextualize knowledge gained through seemingly ‘objective’ methodologies and provide alternative insight into the workings of our educational institutions” (p. 119). She suggests furthermore that the limitations of narrative (for example a biased and partial perspective) are minimised by “collecting and analyzing more than one story and by situating them all into a larger

social, empirical and theoretical context” (p. 120), an argument that informs the study’s analysis of the teacher narratives at its core.

Affect and teacher identity

The role of affect within teacher identity was one of the themes that emerged strongly from the interview narratives, in particular the interplay of the affective domain and experiences of education change. From within this interplay, it was vulnerability that emerged as a key affective concept through which the participants’ teacher identity narratives could be understood. Affect had not initially been identified as a central theme in the study’s design. However, because of the open structure of the interviews, an approach which is discussed in Chapter 4, affect did emerge strongly as a theme. As a result, this section will provide an overview of the literature on affect and teacher identity in order to situate some of the arguments which will be made in the discussion of the findings.

The discussion of the findings is informed by the literature that positions teacher emotions within social and political contexts and interrogates their operation within broader questions of structure, power and agency. Examples of such work includes Zembylas (2014) on emotion and power relations, Song (2016) on emotions, conflict, and vulnerability, and Acheson *et al.* (2016) on emotional labour and teacher burnout. As Benesch (2018) states in the introduction to her paper on teacher agency and emotions:

“[t]he concern here is not with learners’ and teachers’ psychological reactions to learning situations or the optimal emotions for teaching and learning and their enhancement. The focus, instead, is the relationship between institutional regulation of emotions and teachers’ training/ preferences. In other words, the wider social context, including power relations, is central.”

(Benesch 2018, p.1)

It is this aspect of the teacher emotions literature, then, that informs this study, which builds on the idea of emotions as a key component of teacher agency and identity, with a particular attention to how individuals negotiate the affective challenge of the balance between emotions and wider power structures.

The three arguments put forward by Nias (1996) for the value of studying teacher emotions continues to be influential in this field and, indeed, inform this study’s attention to that element of teacher identity:

“1) teaching involves interaction among people, 2) teachers' personal and professional identities are often so inseparable that classrooms and schools become sites for their self-esteem, fulfilment and vulnerability, and 3) teachers have profound feelings about their work, since they invest so much of themselves in it, particularly with their values.”

(Nias 1996, p.299)

Arguably, research on teacher emotions was sparse historically because of its associations with the feminine and the non-rational and, as Uitto *et al.* (2015) suggest, the emphasis on “the mind, cognition and rationality in teaching and learning has left aside the consideration of emotions”. Where emotion was the focus of investigation, it tended to be from a psychological perspective, as Sutton and Wheatley’s review of the literature (2003) showed. Furthermore, the areas of research synthesised by that review could be described as having instrumental or functional priorities. Those areas included classroom management and discipline, teaching strategies, teacher education, and teacher motivation.

However, reviews carried out by Fried *et al.* (2015) [82 publications, 2003 - 2013] and by Uitto *et al.* (2015) [70 articles published in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 1985 - 2014] show that in recent years, and particularly since 2005, there has been an increasing attention towards teacher emotion research and a gradual shift during those periods from the psychological towards the sociological and philosophical, along with an increased emphasis on the contextualised operation of emotions within teacher identities. As is often the case when there is rapid growth in an area, there are various interpretations and definitions emerging from the literature around the concept of teacher emotions. Indeed, as Fried *et al.* (2015) state, “several researchers have stated that the study of teacher emotion is in need of conceptual clarity” (2015, p.415).

Two further points of relevance to this study from the literature on teacher emotions or teacher affect are the observations by Uitto *et al.* (2015) that, in their review, “no studies related to veteran teachers” and that,

“[b]esides students, teachers have other wide relational networks in their work, including with their colleagues, principals, educational administration and the students' parents. However, these other relationships were quite rarely reported in the articles.”

(Uitto *et al.* 2015)

Of course, given that the review focused on papers published by *Teaching and Teacher Education*, it is not an exhaustive review. There are obvious exceptions to this statement amongst papers outside the parameters of the review, in particular Lasky’s 2005 paper

on the vulnerability experienced by Canadian teachers during a period of reform. However, the point stands that the work on teacher emotions does tend to focus more on beginning teachers than end-of-career teachers and on teacher-student relationships more than other relationships. The current study, in drawing attention to these aspects of teacher identity can thus perhaps contribute to offering a fuller picture of the socially located operation of teacher affect.

It is perhaps instructive here to clarify the way in which the concepts affect and emotion are understood for the purposes of this study. These terms (affect and emotion) are used somewhat interchangeably across the literature. However, this study is informed by the definition of 'affect' as the *experience* of emotion (e.g. APA n.d.). Emotion, then, refers to individual or cognitive moments of feeling, such as anger, happiness, disappointment and so on. Affect, on the other hand, encompasses these moments of feeling but also their social context and meaning. Arguably then, the shift in the literature on teacher emotions from the psychological to the sociological could also be characterised as a shift from the analysis of emotions to the analysis of affect. As such, in this study, the term 'affect' will be used in the understanding that it has the capacity to encompass the situated social experience of individual instances of emotion.

Within the broad range of concepts encompassed by the term affect, it is vulnerability that was the most dominant in the analysis of the interview narratives. That vulnerability emerged so strongly fits with the literature on education change and teacher identity, which is discussed below, and also with the ideas discussed in the next section on the concept of learnification and teacher identity. The study's theoretical framework offers a heuristic through which to examine the prevalence of vulnerability in the affective domain of the research participants' teacher identity narratives. The discussion of the findings will bring this concept together with questions of relationality to suggest some possibilities for an alternative interpretation of teacher professionalism, which allows room for affect and the experience of vulnerability.

From teacher to facilitator: Biesta and the learnification of education

Within the teacher identity literature, one of the areas that is of particular relevance to this study is the literature that critiques the effects of policy discourses of teacher professionalism on teacher identity. The increasing prevalence of discourses of teacher professionalism in global education policy was discussed in Chapter 2, when the

international context of the study was outlined. This section discusses the literature that focuses on a particular aspect of those discourses, which is the reframing of ‘teaching’ as ‘facilitating learning’ (Biesta 2015a; 2015b; 2012). In this shift, the emphasis is on the need to move away from direct transmission practices towards pedagogies that prioritise the learning experience of the student and support them in active and constructive learning. This is to be achieved through teaching that is often described as ‘facilitating’ learning. The rationale for such a move is twofold. Firstly, research suggests that students learn more effectively when they are active participants in their own learning. Secondly, the nature of knowledge and knowledge-production is changing so rapidly that it is no longer appropriate for a teacher to deliver a set amount of information to their students but must support them in learning how to access and develop knowledge themselves.

There is of course much of value in this, and it is undeniable that students taking an active role in their learning should be one of the aims of schooling and education. However, the effects on teacher identity of this shift towards teaching as facilitation needs to be considered. The move from teacher to facilitator risks downplaying the professional knowledge, both subject and pedagogical, needed by teachers and could contribute to a perceived deskilling of the profession, with important consequences for future recruitment and retention of high quality teachers. This question is examined in some detail by the philosopher of education Gert Biesta and the following section will discuss his theories on the nature of ‘good’ teaching and what he terms ‘learnification’. This study’s theoretical framework offers a lens through which the concept of learnification can be read in terms of a denial of the ethics of recognition and this idea will be discussed following the presentation of Biesta’s theory.

In his paper “Receiving the gift of teaching” (2012), Biesta argues that
“as a result of the influence of constructivist ideas about learning on education, teaching has become increasingly understood as the facilitation of learning rather than as a process where teachers have something to give to their students.”

(Biesta 2012, p. 449)

Biesta makes an important argument about the effects of this shift (what he calls the ‘learnification of education’) on teaching and on the perception of teachers. The foregrounding of constructivism has led to the discrediting of ‘transmission’ models of teaching, to the point that, as Biesta states “[c]onstructivism seems [...] to have given

up on the idea that teachers have something to teach and that students have something to learn from their teachers” (p. 451). This in turn leads to “a certain embarrassment amongst teachers about the very idea of teaching and about their identity as a teacher” (p. 451).

The current study is not advocating a return to direct transmission practices that position the teacher as the ‘knower’ and the student as the ‘receiver’. However, it does align itself with Biesta’s argument that there needs to be a more nuanced consideration of the effects of the shift towards ‘facilitator’ rather than ‘teacher’. In offering some valuable and thought-provoking perspectives on this question, Biesta makes clear that he is not criticising constructivism itself but rather the effects of some of the misconceptions around constructivism that have become so dominant in teacher education. He acknowledges that one of the difficulties in critiquing the shift from teaching to learning is that the most vocal proponents of ‘traditional’ teaching come from the conservative end of the spectrum and seem to be “making a case in favour of [‘traditional’] teaching [...] precisely because they want teaching to be a powerful act of control” (p. 14). Naturally, “[t]his seems to suggest that the only progressive alternative lies in the demise of the teacher—and more precisely the demise of ‘traditional’ teaching—and a turn towards learning” (p. 2).

The criticism of traditional teaching is valid in highlighting how little control the student has over their learning. However, as Biesta clarifies, the problem is that the debate is seen in binary terms, either teaching or learning, rather than a third option that lies between the two, where the ‘traditional’ idea of the teacher is reexamined and reconstructed along progressive lines to bring the student more firmly into the picture, while not losing sight of the concept of ‘being taught by’. It is this rejection of a binary between one or the other conceptions of teaching that is important in this study, which is interested in the complexity and nuance of teacher identity and the manner in which it can contain simultaneously hold within it contradictory interpretations of the concept of teaching.

Framing this question through Cavarero’s theory of uniqueness allows us to consider the ethics of recognition at play in the tension between ‘traditional’ teaching and the ‘learnification’ model critiqued by Biesta. Neither of these binaries provide for a recognition of the other in the educational relationship nor do they allow the conditions of possibility for the individual expression of uniqueness of being. This is because in

each the focus is more on the ‘what’ of the educational transaction than the ‘who’ of the educational relationship. Furthermore, where one model centres the teacher and neglects the student’s individuality, the other centres the student and neglects the teacher’s individuality. An ethical professionalism that is rooted in the recognition of the other’s uniqueness would move away from these binaries towards an emphasis on the relational nature of education. This type of ethical teacher professionalism with its emphasis on the interdependency of teachers and students allows room for the idea that students’ education does not just involve learning but also, as Biesta highlights, ‘being taught by’. This idea of what a model of ethical professionalism might look like will be developed in the discussion of the study’s findings.

4. Teacher Identity: Research in the Irish Context

Studies of teacher professional identity in the Irish context have shown a number of common findings with three key themes emerging from the literature: 1) the low regard for teacher education compared to experiential learning; 2) the continuing prevalence of modernist or essentialist understandings of teacher identity; and 3) the links between education change and teacher vulnerability. A feature of teacher identity in Ireland that emerges strongly from the literature is the mismatch between values, beliefs, and practices. Furlong (2013), in a study of student teachers’ life histories, found that there was some conflict between the “set of values” formed by the participants’ life histories and “more progressive notions of teaching and learning” and that, because of this, “tensions may surface and interfere with policies for innovation and change” (2013, p.68). In Sugrue’s analysis of a particular cohort of student teachers’ understandings of teacher identity, it was found that lay theories built towards a socially-constructed identity that was essentially modernist in its nature, that is, that there was a belief that there were certain characteristics and traits that were innate to a teacher and that the factors that determined whether a teacher was ‘good’ or ‘bad’ were personality-based (Sugrue 1997). This is not a question that is unique to Ireland. Indeed, Zembylas and Chubbuck (2014) highlight the persistence of this perception as one of the key questions around the concept of teacher identity in the international literature.

For the students in Sugrue's study, the 'good' teacher was the teacher who could maintain order in the classroom, where the "perceived wisdom [is] that it is tantamount to personal failure if students cannot be properly controlled" (Sugrue 1997, p.219). Kitching (2009, p.145) also picks up on the persistence of this image of the teacher; "[t]his humanist notion suggests the task of being expert, being in control and, crucially, being emotionally stable are still attributed very much to the individual teacher" and highlights the dominance of the adult/child binary in Irish classrooms, where, despite rhetoric around student voice, teachers are very much the decision-makers. This culturally inherited understanding of a 'good' classroom as being controlled, with the teacher as a transmitter of information, is an understanding that also extends to the control of teachers, as McGarr and McCormack observe:

"[t]he dominance of the technical paradigm within Irish postprimary schooling ensures that questions around power and control remain unasked. Within such a context, control of both the learner and the learning environment (including the teacher) are prioritized."

(McGarr & McCormack 2014, p.276)

Sexton (2007) argues that the professionalism of Irish teachers is limited because of a preoccupation with procedural issues and a reluctance to engage in questions of educational aims, purposes and philosophy. He identifies a particular weakness in the Irish context when it comes to moral education, whereby, because of the historical dominance of religious education, moral is understood purely in religious terms and teachers are unwilling or unable to conceptualise moral education in broader terms. Devine *et al.* (2013) suggest that any debate around what counts as 'quality' teaching in Ireland fails to take account of the structural and cultural factors at play in the translation of teacher values and beliefs into actual teaching practices, particularly this lack of critical engagement and that, because of this, there has been little real change to teacher practices.

The OECD TALIS 2008 report on teaching practices highlighted the dominance of transmission-based teaching methods in the Irish context (OECD 2009). The principal message from the report was that despite expressing beliefs in constructivist teaching methods, the actual practices of teachers in Ireland tended towards a direct transmission approach. Devine *et al.* (2013) also found evidence of this peculiar dichotomy between beliefs and practices, observing that,

“[a]mbiguity around reflective practice, teaching for diversity and the promotion of active/higher-order learning was especially evident in the contradictions between teachers’ aspirations and the translation of these ideals into practice.”

(Devine *et al.* 2013, p.104)

Devine’s study highlights the “prevalence of exam-oriented, didactic and a-theoretical approaches to teaching and learning” (*ibid*, p.86). A reluctance to actually engage with theory is another issue found in the literature. For example, according to Hall *et al.* (2012),

“[w]hile student teachers in our study acknowledged the support of teachers in their practice schools, this support did not extend to deep engagement with pedagogy which we view as central to current reforms of teacher education.”

(Hall *et al.* 2012, p.115)

The dominance of transmission-based pedagogies and methodologies used by individual teachers cannot be separated from the traditionally prescriptive and narrow nature of the curriculum. For example, Raftery *et al.* highlight how exam-driven the teaching practices in Irish history classes are, even on the part of pre-service teachers, this being “a result of the prominence of state examinations in post-primary education in Ireland” (2007, p.113). National curriculum policy does advocate an active learning, student-centred approach with an emphasis on formative assessment. However, analysts such as Gleeson argue that, while “[t]he rhetoric of holistic education permeates many Irish curriculum documents[...], the reality does not match the rhetoric” (2010, p.341). This mismatch between curriculum policy and practice is highlighted by McMorow,:

“[r]ecent Department of Education and Science guidelines (DES, 2001) for reform of second- level education in Ireland recommend active learning and groupwork methods across all subject areas, yet there is a dearth of empirical evidence of their use.”

(McMorow 2006, p.321)

This “dearth” of the use of active learning methods can also be discerned in the comments by students in McCoy and Byrne (2011, p.149) who expressed a “desire for varied teaching techniques” and “a wider range of subjects and more hands-on, practical subjects”. The lack of varied teaching techniques is likely due, as Raftery *et al.* (2007) suggest, to the necessity of preparing students for the type of assessment represented by the established examination system.

Another theme emerging from the literature that merits particular attention is the low levels of collegiality and high levels of isolation experienced by teachers in Ireland. Both the Second-Level Support Services and the Teaching Council emphasise the value

of collaborative professional learning for teacher professional development, a reflection of the rhetoric used by global policy actors such as the OECD. However, as was found in the TALIS 2008 results, this type of collaboration is not a strong feature of Irish teaching culture, where there is “a relatively stronger emphasis on exchange of co-ordination for teaching compared with professional collaboration” (Shiel *et al.* 2009, p. 8), exchange of co-ordination in this case meaning exchange of materials or of information about students, rather than collaboration that is directed towards professional learning and development.

The finding in Sexton’s study on teacher beliefs that “92% of respondents consider themselves to be highly autonomous as individuals in their daily work” (2007, p.87) suggests perhaps that the concept of autonomy merits some interrogation in the Irish context. It can be linked perhaps to a reductive understanding of the autonomous practitioner, whereby autonomy is understood in the sense of not having another individual constantly overseeing one’s work. Autonomy understood in this narrow way comes to mean working in isolation because collaboration or sharing of difficulties is seen as ceding one’s autonomy. Mac an Ghaill *et al.* (2004) refer to this understanding of autonomy in their description of the teachers who participated in their research:

“[a]lmost all the teachers we surveyed commented on the effect of the cellular organisation of schools, which left them to their own devices in the classroom. As one teacher described it: ‘ploughing my own furrow’. This is reminiscent of what the OECD called, in its 1991 report on Irish education, the ‘legendary autonomy’ of the Irish teacher.”

(Mac an Ghaill *et al.* 2004, p.191)

Similarly, there does not appear to be a culture of collegiality and collaborative learning and teachers are more likely to get teaching ideas from textbooks than from colleagues (Raftery 2007; Halbert & MacPhail 2010). Jeffers (2006) suggests that

“strong inherited traditions of teacher autonomy/isolation and the predominantly ‘closed-door’, privatized practice [have] characterized teaching in Irish schools.”

(Jeffers 2006, pp.191-192)

The data generated by the student teachers in Hall’s work points to a perception of teaching as a solitary occupation with “inadequate opportunity to participate in shared practice” (Hall *et al.* 2012, p.113) in which the act of ‘passing’ for a teacher appears to “require a level of concealment of other significant aspects of the self, specifically and crucially, the self as learner” (Hall *et al.* 2012, p.107).

One of the effects of the isolation of teachers in Ireland is that any difficulties they might experience are very much perceived as individual difficulties and as such are to be solved independently, rather than through collegial collaboration. For example, in McMorrow's study, "[a]ll respondents spoke of the lack of a collaborative culture and how this impedes change and sharing of best practice" (2006, p.330). Furthermore, where sharing did take place, it was only around positive experiences and there was a "silence regarding the difficulties of teaching". This points perhaps to an isolationist, defensive culture and an unwillingness to share problems or weaknesses that is possibly linked to an essentialist view of teaching and the 'good' teacher, as discussed above (Devine *et al.* 2013; Furlong 2013; Sugrue 1997). Arguably, this means that there is little likelihood that the structural and cultural factors that might be contributing to those difficulties will be interrogated. Furthermore, it could mean that teachers will be less likely to experiment with alternative ways of approaching difficulties as any failures will be absorbed by them alone. Kitching (2009) draws attention to this individualisation of difficulties, whereby the focus is on "stress as an individual psychological phenomenon" rather than on the structures and sociocultural factors that contribute to stress. He builds on Hochschild's theories of emotional labour and emotive dissonance to argue that "space must be created for teachers' emotional landscape that might include ambivalence towards the profession" (2009, p.141). A more collegial atmosphere could go some way towards resolving this issue. In the individualised environment at present, such ambivalence is seen as an individual problem and is a possible factor in teachers leaving the profession. In a more collegial environment, such ambivalence could present an opportunity to examine one's work environment together with colleagues and to consider strategies for negotiating such challenges.

5. The Interplay of Teacher Identity and Education Policy

Education change, teacher identity, and vulnerability.

There is a circular dynamic in the relationship between education policy and teacher identity, in that each shapes and is shaped by the other. Lasky outlines how teachers' actions are "simultaneously a consequence of past action and present context and a condition shaping the context for further action" (2005, p.900). Given the key role

that is played by teachers in the enactment of policy, it would seem obvious that teacher identity should be accounted for in the design of education innovations. Yet, as an extensive literature shows, education policy tends to characterise the teacher as the subject of policy rather than as a policy actor in his or her own right and to pay inadequate attention to the specific contexts of teachers' work, meaning that any change that does happen is unlikely to be deep, effective or sustainable (Hargreaves 2005; Schmidt & Datnow 2005; Day *et al.* 2002). Recent policy trends around teacher professionalism and teacher agency would appear to be correcting this and moving towards placing the teacher at the centre of education policy. However, the focus is very much on enhancing teacher quality through a commitment to increasing effectiveness and efficacy, as can be seen in much of the literature emerging from the OECD. The substance of the policies and the manner of implementation can still neglect to take sufficient account of the affective and cultural aspects of teachers' identities (Fullan *et al.* 2015; Kennedy 2011). Furthermore, it can be argued that, despite the rhetoric around teacher professionalism, the policy direction is more towards deprofessionalisation rather than professionalism, meaning externally defined and imposed rather than internally negotiated and accepted (Torabian 2014).

One of the key themes in the international literature on teacher identity is the relationship between educational change, teacher identity, and teacher vulnerability (e.g. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 21, 2005). This has also been identified in the Irish context, with Sexton (2007) arguing that,

“it appears that Irish teachers have become increasingly concerned at their rapidly changing role and, more particularly, by their altered status within the community and in comparison with other workers.”

(Sexton 2007: 79-80)

He suggests that the teaching profession is undergoing a crisis of identity and is struggling to carve out a new identity for itself within the discourses of deprofessionalisation. Certainly, the role of the teacher as constructed in policy has changed dramatically in recent years as, according to Coolahan, there is “a very changed concept of the school from what existed a generation ago” (2001, p.341) and

“[t]he teaching profession is a key mediating agency for society as it endeavours to cope with social change and upheaval” and that, “the teaching profession must adapt a great deal so that it can act in a constructive manner within a fast-changing society.”

(*ibid*, p.337)

The constant demand to adapt can lead to change fatigue, which, as is argued by Van Veen *et al.* (2005) and by Hargreaves (2005), can become a source of resistance to reform.

As mentioned earlier, the structural conditions of teachers' work influence the degree to which teacher identity is characterised by vulnerability. Educational change policy needs to take this vulnerability into account, both acknowledging it where it is already present and anticipating it where it may arise in the course of change (Santoro 2018). A key aspect of this is ensuring that teachers are adequately supported in negotiating changes to their professional selves, particularly where that change might be at odds with values and beliefs that form part of their personal selves. The effects of such a disconnect were observed by Beijaard *et al.*, who found that, where changes in policy "conflict with what teachers personally desire and experience as good", it can lead to friction in teachers' professional identity because the 'professional' and the 'personal' are too far removed from each other (2004, p.109). Day makes a similar observation;

"[r]eforms have an impact upon teachers' identities and because these are both cognitive and emotional, create reactions which are both rational and non rational. Thus, the ways and extent to which reforms are received [...] will be influenced by the extent to which they challenge existing identities."

(Day 2002, p.683)

Where teachers experience periods of this increased vulnerability, a common reaction appears to be a turn to conservatism and a resistance to change. Kelchtermans points out that, where teachers experience a professional vulnerability stemming from aspects of their work over which they have no control, "teachers developed several protective coping strategies that resulted in conservative micropolitical actions aimed at preserving the status quo" (2005, p.997). This phenomenon is explored in depth by Van Veen *et al.* (2005), who use a cognitive social-psychological framework in their study of a Dutch high school teacher's experience of reform and show how the emotional effects of the reform mean that he shifts from a position of reform-enthusiast to resistance and loss of commitment. As with David, the teacher in Van Veen's study, it is often those teachers who invest heavily in their professional identity and who are initially enthusiastic about progressive educational change that are most worn down by failed or badly managed reform attempts. A decrease in a teacher's discretion over their professional life leads to an increase in their feelings of vulnerability in their professional self. Understandably, a

teacher will react to this vulnerability by trying to win back some amount of self-determination in their professional life. At times of reform, this can often take the shape of resistance to change, as this is the one avenue of expression of self available to them.

Policy enactment

In looking at education change, it is important to remember that teachers do not simply implement or reject education policy but take an active position of enactment whereby they interpret and adapt the policy into their existing frameworks of understanding and practice. Those frameworks are in turn affected by changes in policy, thus creating the conditions in which the next policy innovation will be interpreted (Fullan *et al.* 2015; Ketelaar *et al.* 2014; Braun *et al.* 2011a; 2011b; Ezer *et al.* 2010; Ballet *et al.* 2006). In a study of four case-schools, Braun, Ball and Maguire draw attention to the policy processes at work at the school and individual level through their analysis of the ways in which teachers interpret and adapt policy texts according to their own prior values, beliefs and practices. They highlight the fact that teachers are not only policy subjects but also policy actors and that it is thus more appropriate to talk of what happens at school level in terms of policy enactment rather than policy implementation (Braun *et al.* 2011a). The importance of context is central to their study and they “set the work of policy within a framework of contingencies and materialities” (*ibid*, p.581) in order not to lose sight of the complexities of the policy process. In a later paper they point out that, “[p]olicy enactment is a process of social, cultural and emotional construction and interpretation” (Maguire *et al.* 2015, p.2). Their study focuses on four main areas: 1) the localised nature of policy actions; 2) the ways in which simultaneous policies interact with each other; 3) the interpretation work of policy actors; 4) the role of resource differences in responses to policy. These ideas of policy enactment as a contextualised process and teachers as policy actors are particularly influential in this study’s understanding of teacher identity as a temporally and politically situated process.

In focusing on the context of policy enactments, Braun *et al.* highlight the disconnect between the point of education policy production and its enactment, given that many policies tend towards a standardised message that can neglect school-specific conditions, pressures and restraints:

“[p]olicy-making and policy-makers tend to assume ‘best possible’ environments for ‘implementation’: ideal buildings, students and teachers and even resources [...] we have attempted to disrupt this idealism by introducing the ‘reality’ of our case-study schools.”

(Braun *et al.* 2011b, p.595)

Sellar and Lingard also make this point; “Schools are not neutral institutions in respect of social inequality and opportunity structures; a reality often neglected in schooling policy” (2012, p.57). Braun *et al.* point out that there is a surprising lack of attention given to context in analyses of education policy enactment. They argue that, because of ‘situated necessities’, schools “produce, to some extent, their own ‘take’ on a policy” (2011b, p.586). Policies might be ‘disruptive’ to a school community, requiring major organisational or pedagogical changes but they can also be subject to ‘containment’, whereby the policy is enacted in a way that does not involve any real change. For example, a policy might be written into school documentation for accountability reasons but not fully enacted, a process the authors call ‘creative non-implementation’ or ‘fabrication’ (2011b, p.586). Furthermore, where a policy is ‘diluted’ at school level, it can lead to the policy message being lost; “where they get superficially mapped on to current practices, any innovatory potential may simply be ignored” (2011b, p.586). This ignoring is not necessarily linked to an unwillingness to innovate and it is essential thus to understand the context in which this action is taking place and the potential factors that may contribute to the divide between a policy intention and its effect. The problem of the unaccountable teacher is a constant motif in education policy however (as Thompson and Cook (2014) point out) and it is thus often the case that the failure of a policy to lead to projected innovations is located at the point of the teacher.

In a later paper, Maguire, Braun, and Ball bring their focus more closely to the social construction of policy enactments, moving from examining the school-level to looking at the individuals within the school with a view to “understanding how it is that certain policies, or strands within policies, are selected and who selects them and what alternatives are discarded along the way” (Maguire *et al.* 2015, p.2). They look at policy enactment as “a form of interpretation and intersubjectivity in action” (*ibid*, p.3), where individuals’ positions and relationships within an organisation feed into the enactment of policies adopted by the organisation as a whole. Examples of individual responses include authoritative actors producing ‘pre-emptive readings’, experienced teachers

adopting policy rhetoric but not allowing it to influence their practice or NQTs using policy texts as a form of standardised guidance. The point, then, is to remember that, despite the impression given in much policy rhetoric, “policy enactment [is] a more fragile and unstable process than is sometimes imagined” (*ibid.* p.14). This idea of policy enactment as unstable informs this study’s interrogation of teacher identity in that it draws attention to the fluidity of policy processes and the potential for teachers as policy actors to act within these processes in a manner that challenges the notion of policy as occupying a separate sphere to the everyday lives of teachers.

Education change, teacher identity, and change ownership

Following this, it is clear that one of the principal factors in positive education change is cohesion between the perceived values shaping the change policies and teachers’ existing values. Where this cohesion is not apparent, or where the policy entails a challenge to the status quo, the change must be managed in such a way as to bridge the gap between the existing and the ‘ideal’ teacher identity. A key factor to be addressed in negotiating change is the question of change ownership.

Providing for teacher ownership of change means involving teachers in the development of policies. This is essential because “reform efforts are doomed to fail unless teachers and their associations become involved in helping to shape and assess improvement policies and strategies” (Fullan *et al.* 2015, p.15). Ketelaar *et al.* argue along the same lines, contending that teachers must have some sense of ownership over reform as this can lead to “a successful integration of the innovation into teachers’ practices, even when no external rewards are attached” (2014, p.316). Even where teachers do in fact agree with the content of the reform, they are likely to resist it if they do not feel adequate professional ownership of it (Huberman 1993). Examples of this were found by LaBoskey in her study of American teachers’ experiences of reform efforts: “they see standards as essential, they just have trouble with [...] the external determination of them” (2006, p.113) and by O’Donoghue in his study on Australian teachers, where there was resistance to reform because “the vast majority of the teachers were adamant that the call for change did not originate from within the teaching force” (2007, p.74). Ketelaar *et al.* argue that the role of teacher agency needs to be examined when considering resistance to education reform. They argue that “[t]o give direction to one’s process of sense-making and to be able to make choices within that

process, a teacher needs to experience a certain degree of agency in his or her work” and point out that “teachers with a strong sense of agency tend to attribute their successes and failures with an innovation to themselves, while teachers with a lack of agency tend to attribute it to external factors” (2014, p.317).

The context of Irish education, particularly at second-level, is interesting with regard to teacher voice and status. The teacher unions in Ireland are somewhat unique in an international context in terms of the strength of their voice in the education policy process. This stems perhaps from the fact that historically, as discussed above, teachers had high cultural and social status in Ireland. In the 1980s, there was a general push towards implementing a process of representational social partnership across government policymaking operations and, under the guidance in particular of Minister Gemma Hussey, this model became embedded in the Department of Education, with the teacher unions as some of the core partners. Indeed, following the establishment of the Curriculum and Examinations Board (later the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) under this model, “the teacher unions exercise an effective veto over curriculum decision-making” (Gleeson *et al.* 2014, p.17). Given this relatively powerful position of the teacher unions in the policymaking process, it is arguably the case that a strong sense of teacher voice and policy ownership should be a feature of the teaching profession’s group identity. However, despite the formal strength of the teacher representatives’ voice in the policy process, research has shown that teachers in the Irish context do not necessarily experience the expected sense of voice and, as Gleeson argues, “the expected sense of curriculum ownership has not percolated down to their [the unions] membership [and] teacher ownership [remains] a major problem” (Gleeson 2010, p.266).

Another aspect of teacher ownership of change involves ensuring that there is ample opportunity for teachers to make sense of reforms on their own terms and with respect to their existing belief frameworks. Teachers are unlikely to change their belief frameworks to incorporate new practices if they are not persuaded of the value of doing so. Teachers’ interpretations of reforms are influenced by, for example, colleagues, unions, management and media, often leading to conflicting or incomplete information. Inservice education around reforms in the Irish context, where it is provided, tends to focus on the instrumental aspects of implementation rather than addressing the purpose and aim behind the change. It cannot be taken for granted that teachers will engage with

reforms unless opportunities are provided for them to do so and their work environment is such that they can afford to take risks in experimenting with new practices (Reio 2005; Schmidt & Datnow 2005). In their study of teacher agency at a time of curriculum reform, Priestley *et al.* observe that, due to “an apparent lack of opportunities for systematic sense-making of the core concepts of Curriculum for Excellence, teachers’ understandings of the concepts often remain superficial and vague” (2015, p.636), a problem that has been observed in attempted policy reforms in many contexts. Priestley *et al.* comment that their study raises “some uncomfortable issues about the ways in which teachers engage with new curricular policy, and about their agency” (2015, p.636).

The word ‘uncomfortable’ is worth noting here, as research into teacher identity and education change can seem to skirt around the uncomfortable questions, preferring to critique external barriers to change rather than internal ones within the profession. The current study attempts to unpack some of these ‘uncomfortable’ issues around teacher agency and the relationships between teacher identity and education policy through a focus on the micro-level of professional identity. It does this not in order to criticise or find fault but from the conviction that a reluctance to acknowledge and explore internal vulnerabilities within the profession ultimately leaves it weaker and more susceptible to negative external forces.

6. Theoretical Commitments and Guiding Concepts

This final part of the literature review will outline the three principal areas of theoretical literature that inform the study’s theoretical framework, focusing in particular on the theoretical work of Adriana Cavarero and of Judith Butler and on empirical work in the field of education which draws on their theories. The methodological reasoning behind choosing to build the theoretical framework on the work of Cavarero and Butler, will be explained in the next chapter. That chapter will also outline the manner in which their philosophical positions inform the empirical aspects of the study, in the understanding that rejecting a binary between the humanities and the social sciences can offer richness and complexity to empirical research methodologies (Wilson and Santoro 2015).

In the first section, the study's approach to the concept of identity will be outlined and located within the feminist research literature. The following sections will focus in more detail on the two theorists whose respective work on identity anchors the study's methodology and theoretical framework: firstly, Adriana Cavarero and her narrative theory of identity and, secondly, Judith Butler and her theories of discourse and performativity. The last section looks for ways in which the work of these theorists can be brought into conversation in a way that provides a lens through which to approach the analysis of the interview narratives. This discussion centres on the manner in which ideas of relationality, vulnerability, and the ethics of recognition can be understood to be threaded through the work of each theorist in various ways. These ideas in turn inform the understanding of ethical professionalism that emerges from the analysis of the interview narratives.

Feminist theory in education research: a commitment to complexity

While it is identity that is at the core of this study, I am not seeking to define or delimit an identity, to state, "this is who this person is". This aim would be incongruous with my position within the theoretical tradition that rejects certainty, embraces plurality and accepts the subjectivity of knowledge. Rather, it is identity as an act that I am interested in: "[i]t is a process [...] not a 'thing'. It is not something that one can *have*, or not; it is something that one *does*" (Jenkins 2008, p.5, emphasis in original). The study seeks to examine the ways in which a person interprets their world retrospectively to maintain a coherent sense of self through the course of a life, the negotiations involved in bringing the self now into interaction with the self then, in the understanding that "people continue to construct and reconstruct their identities all through their lives" (Czarniawska 1998, p.41). Thus, I am taking a view of identity as an attempt to negotiate some sort of sense of self from the complex interplay between the individual and the social, and the ebbs and flows in that interplay over the course of time, aware that, "[i]dentity is complex, confusing and, above all, an ongoing struggle" (MacLure 2003, p.19).

In keeping with the idea of identity as an act, I understand identity as an active storying of the self; "[n]arrative, as Ricoeur (1974) reminds us, imposes on the events of the past a form that in themselves they do not really have" (Munro 1998, p.6). In this, I align myself with those theorists of identity who emphasise the importance of memory.

Identity is a retrospective sense-making of the self, in which one draws on the story of one's life in order to understand oneself and the world; "[b]y considering identity in terms of narrative, it is possible to see past and present linked in a spiral of interpretation and reinterpretation" (Lawler 2008 p.19). Crucially, this story is constantly changing and particular experiences or events may become more or less important in the broader narrative, according to circumstance or context. Entire memories may shift and alter in order to better scaffold a particular interpretation of the self and the world. Of course, "this perspective has to be seen in the context of a hermeneutic tradition that stresses the interpreted character of the social world" (Lawler 2008, p.29), a perspective that fits with the epistemological framework of this research study, as discussed in the chapter on the study's methodology.

Given my paradigmatic positions and the assumptions arising from those positions, the field of feminist theory emerged as the most appropriate choice of research tradition for this study. Feminist theorists "posed a serious challenge to the so-called value neutrality of positivistic social science" (Hesse-Biber 2007, p.7) and continue to do so. They investigate questions of how power operates in everyday life, how the individual negotiates the constraining limits of the social world, and how the personal and the political intersect. They argue, indeed, that the personal *is* political and that the operation of power and politics should be understood through close attention to the particulars of everyday existence. They contend that

"rather than dismissing human emotions and subjectivities, unique lived experiences, and worldviews as contaminants or barriers to the quest for knowledge, we might embrace these elements to gain new insights and understandings, or in other words, new knowledge."

(Hesse-Biber 2007, p.14)

This argument has influenced my framework of understanding, in that I reject the idea of binaries between the self and the social or between power and vulnerability. This view of identity, as complex and plural, aligns itself well with feminist theory:

"[f]eminist poststructural theories of subjectivity posit a notion of the self as a site of disunity and conflict that is always in process and constructed within power relations."

(Youngblood-Jackson 2001, p.386)

I am interested, thus, not in the grand, overt operation of power, but rather in the operation of power at the micro level, and in the ways in which this micro-level power is what ultimately feeds back into the macro structures shaping our world.

A major influence in the study's theoretical framework is the work of the feminist poststructuralists. In this, I align myself with Davies' definition of the value of a poststructuralist approach:

“[s]tructuralism recognises the constitutive force of discourse and of the social structures that are constituted through those discourses. Post-structuralism opens up the possibility of agency to the subject through the very act of making visible the discursive threads through which their experience of themselves as specific beings is woven. It also defines discourse and structure as something which can be acted upon and changed.”

(Davies 1993, p.11)

St. Pierre and Pillow view feminism and poststructuralism not as being one and the same but as working *beside* each other to challenge foundationalisms and essentialisms. They are not necessarily always in agreement - they “work similarly and differently to trouble foundational ontologies, methodologies and epistemologies, in general, and education, in particular” (St. Pierre & Pillow 2000, p.2). Ropers-Huilman also highlights the way that poststructuralism and feminism work with and against each other:

“[p]ost-structuralism's focus on differences and tentativeness is aided by feminism's attention to political action. Used as a tool to break down assumed relationships, post-structural feminism illuminates, and allows for the analysis of, infinite points of intersection of our social structures.”

(Ropers-Huilman 1997, p.331)

Taking the question of gender as an example, feminist poststructuralists highlight how women have historically been curtailed by powerful social assumptions about what it is to be a woman. These assumptions have no biological basis but, because of how they came to dominate social thought, they became accepted as indisputable truths. These discourses becoming so dominant meant that other ways of being a woman were unthinkable, to the point that women who behaved in ways outside societal norms were often shunned or set apart. Contemporary feminist theorists argue that these assumptions around what it is to be male or female, although they are shifting, are still very much part of the fabric of our social world and persist in curtailing the conditions of possibility open to the individual in their construction of an identity.

The power at work in this process is a diffuse, insidious power. We are all of us complicit in regulating gendered behaviours because it is in the mundanity of everyday life, in our banal decisions about what we do or don't do, that certain behaviours come

to be reinforced as normal and acceptable while others are placed outside those boundaries. This applies to gendered behaviours but also to the construction of norms around sexuality, class, ethnicity and the whole range of other categories into which we divide our behaviours.

This study does not explicitly concern itself with the question of gender, in the understanding that “[f]eminist perspectives may begin but do not end with women” (Hooyman *et al.* 2002, p.4). However, it very much follows the tradition of feminist theorists in arguing that, as outlined above, powerful social forces operate to set the limits of which behaviours and ways of being are acceptable in any given situation. Whether we adhere to or transgress those limits, we are playing our part in shaping the parameters of our social world. Taking this theory and applying it to a study of teacher identity means interrogating the norms and assumptions around what it is to be a teacher and examining how those assumptions are reinforced or challenged by the manner in which individual teachers construct their professional identity as they move through their career.

The theorists who work within these fields argue that our identity, our understanding of the world and of our place within it, is a constantly evolving construction. They reject the idea of any pre-existing certainty and emphasise the idea of identity as an act, that is, identification as an ongoing process rather than identity as a fixed attribute of the person. They highlight the fluid, evolving nature of identity as the individual moves through the life course. In this understanding of identity as a construction, attention is drawn to the powerful role played by social norms and assumptions that delimit the acceptable ways of being and thinking. The individual, then, does not construct their identity freely but is affected by dominant discourses around what is doable, thinkable, sayable.

“[T]eachers take part in constructing their own identities, but others take part as well as they bring socially constructed expectations and assumptions about a [...] teacher’s multiple identities into classroom discourses. Therefore, these identities are always fluctuating and contextually-bound.”

(Ropers-Huilman 1997, p.332)

This understanding of identity as fluid, contextualised and socially-bound is one that comes to the fore in much of the literature on teacher identity (e.g. Beauchamp 2015; Zembylas & Chubbuck 2014).

A final point to note on the choice of a feminist theoretical framework is that this contributes to the use of feminist research approaches in educational research in the Irish context. Arguably, feminist theory has traditionally been under-used in research on mainstream education in Ireland, although this has been changing in recent years. While there is by now a relatively substantial literature in the field of feminist theory and education in the Irish context, it has been focused predominantly on the sectors of higher education, community education and early childhood education (e.g. O’Grady 2018; Galvin & Mooney Simmie 2017; Quilty 2017; Prins 2017; Lynch, Grummell & Devine 2015; Moane & Quilty 2011; Moloney 2010). Where research in the mainstream primary and post-primary sector has been informed by feminism, it has examined gender differences in educational experiences and outcomes (MacPhail et al. 2009; Drudy 2008; Drudy 2006; O’Sullivan 1999), teacher demographics (Keane & Heinz 2015; Heinz 2013; Heinz 2008) and sexuality (Fahie 2017; Neary *et al.* 2016).

Much of the educational research in this context that uses feminist theory tends to have an explicit gender or sexuality focus. Furthermore, “[e]xisting references to this realm of the policy process [gender theory] in Irish educational studies ‘gloss’ it as conceptually and procedurally uncomplicated” (O’Sullivan 1999, p.310). This study moves beyond this to demonstrate that the theoretical insights developed by feminist theorists can help to deepen our understanding of complex issues that do not immediately appear to be what is traditionally viewed as a “feminist” issue. Of course, this statement must be qualified by arguing that the view that it is possible to define issues as feminist or not feminist is itself an outdated view and does not necessarily align itself with modern feminist thinking.

This study is informed by the insights the existing literature provides into the social and cultural context of education in Ireland, particularly in terms of its illustration of the dominant narratives and discourses operating around identity and educational relationships. However, this study, while acknowledging its debt to the existing literature, does not focus explicitly on gender or sexuality. Rather, it adopts a feminist theoretical perspective in the understanding that this tradition, in its attention to nuance and complexity, offers a useful lens through which to interrogate the relationships between the personal, the social, and the political within teacher identity. In this way, the study extends the existing literature in the field of educational research in the Irish context.

Uniqueness, vulnerability, and interdependency: narrating the self

The work of the Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero is a key influence in the study's theoretical framework, in particular the 'narratable self', the narrative theory of identity and uniqueness that she proposes in her book 'Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood' (1997; 2000). The principle elements of this theory include an understanding of each individual as unique and irreplaceable, the idea of narration and storying as key to the individual's selfhood, and an emphasis on the inescapable interdependency of individuals. These three interlinked ideas form the foundation from which the current study builds its theoretical framework and, as such, they inform the research approach, the analytic framework, and the discussion of the findings. Thus, in order to anchor the next chapters of the dissertation theoretically, this section will discuss some key aspects of Cavarero's theory and outline some examples of its use in education research.

In Cavarero's theory of narrative identity, each individual is a unique and unrepeatable existence whose story of the self is, after the same fashion, unique and unrepeatable. Using Hannah Arendt's concept of 'natality' as way of understanding every life as an entirely new beginning (1958), Cavarero argues that each person is a singular, unique and "insubstitutable" existence (Cavarero 2000, p.2). Crucially however, the concept of individual uniqueness is not to be confused with individualism, particularly the competitive individualism of contemporary politics. Her focus on the individual and on individuality does not mean that Cavarero is advocating individualism. In fact, she emphasises that each of us, in our uniqueness, exists in relation to the other. In order to understand ourselves in our uniqueness, we depend on others, on their perception of us and their acknowledgement of our existence. We are thus entirely vulnerable to the other and it is precisely through this vulnerability that we come to understand ourselves.

Cavarero builds on Arendt's work on political biography to emphasise that it is through stories that human beings understand themselves and the world around them. She argues that the individual cannot ever apprehend the entirety of their own story because they are inescapably within it. We can draw on moments, experiences, and emotions to attempt to fashion a coherent narrative of the self but in the end, we are reliant on others to fill in the blanks in the story, to show us ourselves. We turn to the recollections, memories, and judgements of others to fill in the patchwork nature of our

narrative, while we do the same for them. This interdependence is rooted in vulnerability because, although an interaction may amount to no more than an acknowledgement of the other, that acknowledgement denied can render a person invisible. This idea of the intersections of vulnerability and interdependency is one of the key ideas that informs the discussion of the findings that emerged from the research interviews.

As discussed above, this study views identity as a fluid process of negotiation. Following Cavarero, this negotiation can be understood as a search for a unity of the self. Speaking of the ‘unity’ of the self “is not to say that it has at its centre a compact and coherent identity” but rather that “it is the *desire* for this unity or form that manifests itself in the relation between life and narration or storytelling” (Cavarero 2000, p.xxii). Narration thus can be seen to operate as a means of bringing coherence to an individual’s understanding of their selfhood, in that it brings together complex, unstable and often contradictory strands in a coherent story of the self. However, Cavarero does not suggest that the idea of narrative as a structuring force means that each person is destined to live their life according to a particular story and only that story, as such a belief would be to limit the conditions of possibility for alternative ways of being. This idea builds on Arendt (1958), who, according to Tamboukou and Livholts, was

“very careful to clarify that living life as a story should not mean that one creates a normative pattern that has to be followed [but] about creating conditions of possibility that will eventually allow the story to emerge.”

(Tamboukou & Livholts 2015, p.123)

This idea informs the study’s approach to its analysis of teacher identity. The openness of the research method allows for unpredictability in the teacher narratives. Furthermore, in the discussion of the findings, it is argued that the dominance of certain narratives of teacher identity limit the potential for alternative models to emerge. The study is also informed methodologically by Cavarero’s theories around the role of narration in the individual’s understanding of identity and selfhood, in that the research method and instrument build on these ideas and on the openness to possibility that is a key aspect of this type of narrative identity work. The research method and Cavarero’s influence on its design will be further discussed in the next chapter, which focuses on the study’s research methodology.

The potential within Cavarero's theories for a politics anchored in relationality is highlighted by Biesta, who draws attention to the important distinction that Arendt makes between uniqueness as 'difference' and uniqueness as 'irreplaceability', whereby the former is based on 'what' and the latter on 'who' (Biesta 2016; Arendt 1958). Cavarero similarly rejects the idea of identity as a 'what' in favour of the 'who'. By this I understand that, rather than highlighting characteristics and sociological types, the emphasis in Cavarero's theory is on the person as a whole and as an individual:

“[w]hereas philosophy continues to talk of identities and subjectivity, which only express the *what* or the qualities of the subject, the focus in Cavarero is on the *who*.”

(Cavarero & Bertolino 2008, p.130, emphasis in original)

Cavarero “avoids imposing cultural identities on the unrepeatable uniqueness of every human being” but rather emphasises “nonstandardizing and noninstitutionalized selfhood” (Cavarero & Bertolino 2008, pp.129–130). Cavarero's emphasis is very much on the other as another *person* and our vulnerability towards the other becomes thus an interdependence amongst individuals. This focus on the relational nature of existence is one of the ways, according to her translator, that Cavarero's work can contribute to a new understanding of politics, based not on universals and generalisations but on relationality: “a new sense of politics, an alternative way of understanding human interaction, as the interaction of unique existents” (Cavarero 2000, p.ix). This understanding of relationality as political offers the potential for a reframing of teacher professionalism which emphasises the ethics of recognition as a tool for negotiating the political, professional and personal challenges of teacher identity. This idea forms part of the dissertation's core argument and it will be explored in greater detail during the discussion of the findings in Part Two of the dissertation.

Arising from this, the study is informed by the literature that brings these ideas of relationality and of the unique 'who' to the field of education, offering new perspectives through them on the educational relation (e.g. Adami 2014; Todd 2011; Forrest *et al.* 2010). One of the key arguments emerging from this literature is the potential that an embrace of plurality offers in negotiating the individualising discourses of current educational and political contexts. For example, building on Todd's concept of 'democratic plurality' (2011), Allen and Quinlivan (2016) call for a 'radical plurality' as a means of reconceptualising Relationships and Sexuality Education in an increasingly ethnically diverse New Zealand context. This idea of radical plurality

brings the unique ‘who’ into focus in order to challenge the generalising ‘what’ that risks silencing individual narratives. Importantly, this type of plurality, while it emphasises uniqueness, does not position the individual as atomistic. Rather, it centres relationality by emphasising the interdependency of individuals and the crucial role recognition plays in uniqueness. Parr *et al.* (2018), Diamond *et al.* (2017), and Rather (2014) all use variations on this theme to suggest ways in which teachers’ practice can benefit from a reframing of relationality in education that is attentive to this conceptualisation of plurality. These ideas are central to this study’s understanding of identity and to its theoretical framework. As such, the study’s concluding remarks will follow the literature on plurality in the educational relation in suggesting some ways in which a reframing of individuality can serve to negotiate the challenges of an atomisation of competitive individualism that is a feature of current discourses of teacher professionalism.

In adopting Cavarero’s theories as a foundation for its theoretical framework, the study makes a theoretical contribution to the education research literature in the Irish context. While Cavarero has informed work in the field of educational research internationally, her theories have not been widely used in the field of teacher identity research in Ireland. An exception is perhaps Neary (2016), whose work on LGBTQ teachers touches on Cavarero, although her frameworks are more explicitly informed by Foucault, Butler and Ahmed. Other work within the field of Irish education does also reference Cavarero in terms of her development of Arendt’s theories, although, again, Cavarero’s work itself is not the core theoretical anchor (e.g. Ryan 2018 on childhood; O’Donnell 2012 on prison education). By explicitly centring Cavarero in its theoretical framework, the current study aims to bring a relatively new perspective to the study of Irish teacher identity and to build on its successful adoption in other contexts.

Performativity, agency, and vulnerability: negotiating a balance

In adopting Cavarero’s theories of identity as the primary theoretical anchor for this study, I am making a theoretical commitment to the concepts of uniqueness, plurality and openness in my approach to understanding teacher identity. However, alongside this commitment to the uniqueness of the individual, I remain attuned to the power of the social and to the idea that there are socially constructed parameters to the conditions of possibility under which the individual exists. Thus, while the study

maintains an openness in its theoretical framework towards the idea that each research participant's narrative of teacher identity is unique to them, it does not lose sight of the fact that those narratives are subject to powerful social and cultural narratives of teaching. In order to allow for a perspective on teacher identity that brings the complex interplay of individual uniqueness and social construction into focus, the study's theoretical framework draws on Judith Butler's work on identity and brings her theories into conversation with Cavarero's theories. The next section will outline how the framework draws on these two theorists and will discuss some existing research in the field of education that brings their work together. Firstly, however, the current section will outline the particular aspects of Judith Butler's work that inform the study's theoretical framework. It will begin with a discussion of the theory of performativity and the attention it brings to the role of discourse in identity work (1990). Following this, some of Butler's more recent work which has focused on ideas of interdependency and the ethics of recognition will be discussed (2012; 2011; 2010; 2001). It is from this work in particular that this study draws the understandings of relationality and vulnerability that allow Butler's work to be brought alongside that of Cavarero in the theoretical framework. These concepts, and the manner in which both Butler and Cavarero operationalise them, form the core of the model of ethical professionalism that is proposed in the discussion of the study's findings.

The theory of performativity, as adopted and developed by the feminist philosopher Judith Butler (1990), has been influential in developing my approach to understanding the construction of identity. Butler's concept of performativity can be characterised as referring to "the claim that identity is performed or enacted through repetitive actions executed in a framework of socially sanctioned norms" (Forrest *et al.* 2010, p.90). In developing her theory, Butler draws upon the concept of performativity developed originally by J. L. Austin in 1962 (Lovell 2003). The concept of performativity encompasses the idea that one does not construct an identity from a place of freedom but rather from a place that is already defined and delineated. It is through a network of prior understandings and assumptions that our interpretation of ourselves and the world is filtered. In the act of constructing an identity, we are curtailed and channelled in certain ways by these pre-existing norms, we perform to a script as it were. In this understanding of identity, an individual's identity is not essential or fixed but is a construction which we perform as we move through life and engage with the

world around us. To behave in ways that are other than what is socially accepted is to step outside the boundaries of the performance, to transgress the limits of the script and to become thus unthinkable, unsayable.

Butler draws attention to the power of this process of social norms, observing that “the Other is recognized and confers recognition through a set of norms that govern recognizability” (Butler 2001, p.22). Taylor notes that

“[i]n her [Butler's] view subjectivity is ‘radically conditioned’ and this has led to many criticisms that her theories over-emphasise language, that she accords little room to agency, and works with a denuded version of the social.”

(Taylor 2011, p.826)

One of these criticisms can be attributed to Benhabib; “[m]y position was that in *Gender Trouble* (1990) at least, Butler subscribes to an overly constructivist view of selfhood and agency that leaves little room for explaining the possibilities of creativity and resistance” (Benhabib 1999, p.338). I would contend however, that there is room for agency in Butler’s theory because the manner in which individuals interpret or enact discourses can become a way of expressing “relational dynamics of power and agency” (Munro 1998, p.34).

Through engaging with Butler’s theoretical work, then, we come to an understanding of our reality as being shaped by the operation of dominant discourses that set the parameters of the acceptable behaviours and ways of being within which we perform our identities. This idea can, however, give the impression that we are powerless within our realities and that, rather than any coherent self, we are merely a collection of constructs shaped by forces outside ourselves. While I stand firm in rejecting the essentialist idea of a core true and unchanging self, I am reluctant to abandon the idea of the coherent self. By this I do not mean that the coherent self *exists* but rather that the *desire* for a coherent self is key to understanding how we live our lives. This position is further discussed and clarified in the section on the study’s ontological and epistemological framework.

Butler’s theories have been further developed in her own work and in the work of other researchers who have built upon her insights in fields across the disciplines from humanities and the social sciences to the natural sciences. In this study, I build on the work of researchers who have continued to develop the theory of performativity beyond an immediate focus on gender and sexuality. For example, Forrest *et al.* adopt

the concept to explore the experiences of teacher education students and the idea that “part of the disillusionment of the beginner in this project of becoming her ideal has to do with a mistaken conception of the relation between the stories we tell ourselves and the selves we uniquely are” (Forrest *et al.* 2010, p.90). Falter also makes use of the theory in studying teaching, observing that “if we understand teaching identity as a gendered practice, then we also must understand how the practice is constructed through the performance of teaching” (Falter 2015, p.8). Examining teacher identity through the lens of performativity theory, brings attention to the ways in which discourses of professionalism permeate teachers’ lives and set parameters to the ways of being a teacher that are accepted as appropriate and fitting with the norms and assumptions of the profession. Furthermore, because performativity includes the idea that individuals are at once subject to and agents of discourse, it can highlight the way in which actors in the education sphere, including teachers, reinforce, reinterpret or renegotiate the discourses around teacher identity.

In a similar fashion, if we take it that policy is a socially situated construct, performativity theory can allow us to see how teachers, in their enactment of policy and their rejection or reinforcing of particular policy discourses, contribute to the ways in which those policies shape educational contexts (Braun *et al.* 2011a; 2011b). We see, then, a dynamic interactive relationship emerge in which it is not only the case that policy shapes teachers but also the case that teachers shape policy. The theory of performativity is useful in understanding this process, whereby we are simultaneously both subject and agent, subject to the limiting discourses of our social world, but ourselves agentic in the construction of those very discourses.

In a 2010 interview with Butler, Vikki Bell suggests that

“your [Butler’s] current work seems to be developing the notion of vulnerability that you highlighted in ‘Precarious Life’ and formulating a notion of affective sociality.”

(Bell 2010, p.146)

This area of Butler’s work, where she unpacks her ideas around vulnerability and relationality are of particular relevance to this study, both in terms of what it says on its own terms and of how it can work alongside Cavarero’s theories. In her 2001 paper and 2005 book ‘Giving an Account of Oneself’, and in the book ‘Precarious Life’ (2004), Butler rebuts the idea that there is no space for responsibility within the post-structural, discursively-constructed self. Rather, we are reliant on the Other for the recognition that

allows us to attempt to understand ourselves: “the only way to know myself is precisely through a mediation that takes place outside of me, exterior to me” (Butler 2001, p.23). This implies an interdependency in which we in turn are responsible to the Other. As Bell observed, Butler continues to develop these ideas of interdependency, responsibility and relationality in her work following ‘Precarious Life’. Given that we are bound to the Other in the understanding of ourselves and our lives, the notion of interdependency extends to the idea that

“the life of the other, the life that is *not* our own, is also our life, since whatever sense “our” life has is derived precisely from this sociality, this being already, and from the start, dependent on a world of others, constituted in and by a social world.”

(Butler 2012, pp.140-141)

This position necessitates an acknowledgement of the responsibility we bear towards the Other because a denial of that responsibility would amount to a denial of our own essential vulnerability. This denial of our own vulnerability in the face of the Other is impossible because, as Butler argues in a 2012 roundtable on the topic of precarity,

“to be alive is already to be connected with, dependent upon, what is living not only before and beyond myself, but before and beyond my humanness.”

(Puar *et al.* 2012, p.174)

These notions of interdependency and vulnerability inform the study’s interpretation of teacher identity and, in particular, the positioning of autonomy and accountability within current discourses of teacher professionalism. If the individual is always bound to the Other, to the extent that the individual’s singularity is dependent on the recognition of the Other (Butler 2012; 2001), then an ethical approach to education must be cognisant of the essential interdependency of individuals within the educational relation. Following this line of reasoning, the potential of the educational relation is limited where a dominant interpretation of teacher autonomy exists that is rooted in the idea of autonomy as based on independence and individualism. The discussion of the study’s findings will develop this argument and propose an alternative model of autonomy built around relational accountability, in which our vulnerability to the Other is seen as a crucial part of an ethical teacher professionalism capable of negotiating the challenges of the competitive individualism of contemporary education discourse.

Theoretical framework: ‘thinking with’ Cavarero and Butler

In a 2008 interview, Cavarero discusses Butler’s work and the links and disparities she sees between it and her own:

“my perspective is more in sympathy with that of Judith Butler, who when speaking of vulnerability clarifies immediately that vulnerability is part of our material and corporeal relation.”

(Cavarero & Bertolino 2008, p.141)

At the same time however, Cavareo is careful to emphasise that she rejects “the atomistic assumptions of individualism which she takes to be a contradictory element in identity politics, specifically as expressed in the work of Judith Butler” (Forrest 2015, p. 590).

Cavarero’s theory recognises that the storying of identity is dependent on the acknowledgement of the other and that our uniqueness is only known to us in relation to the other. Alongside this, in line with Butler’s theory of performativity, the limits of the narratives available to us are delineated by powerful discourses that create the conditions of possibility around acceptable ways of thinking, being and behaving. These theoretical foundations form the basis for the study and allow me to explore the complexity in the relationship between the individual and the social, a relationship in which power and vulnerability are in constant interplay. Forrest *et al.* (2010) found it similarly useful to bring together the work of Butler and Cavarero for their paper *Understanding narrative relations in teacher education*, where they examine student teachers’ desire for a coherent sense of the ‘who’ of their individual teacher identity, in the sense Cavarero proposes of the individual’s selfhood. Their paper brings Butler and Cavarero together to unpack the tensions in the student teachers’ narratives between this desire and the power of dominant constructions of the ‘ideal’ teacher.

A key way in which Butler and Cavarero come together in the study’s theoretical framework is through the concept of relationality, that is, the idea that in our processes of identity we are never operating as disconnected entities but are always socially situated. As such, the study pays close attention to relationships and to the presence of the Other in the research participants’ narratives of identity. Within this, the ideas of recognition and acknowledgement are of particular interest. Paraphrasing Cavarero, it is not what is said that is important, but the saying of it in the first place. By making an utterance, a gesture, we are placing ourselves into the world, communicating that, “this

is me, I am here”. The acknowledgement of the other in that moment is drawn into our narrative of the self. As outlined above, Butler also draws attention to the importance of relationality in the process of identity, observing succinctly that, “we are undone by the other, I am nothing without you” (2001). Drawing on Cavarero, one could argue that it is not quite the case that we *are* nothing without the other. However, where we do depend on the other is in order to *recognise* ourselves as something, other than nothing.

It is here, then, that these two theorists speak to each other for me, that is, in their emphasis on our vulnerability to the other. It is not necessarily that our being in the world is entirely dependent on the other. However, it *is* through the other that we understand our being in the world. Thus, it is not that we are nothing without the other, but that our frames of meaning are nothing without the other. It is always in relation to the other that we make sense of our existence and, by extension, of ourselves. Following this, our sense of our own uniqueness is also dependent on the recognition of the Other and, in turn, the Other is dependent on our recognition. Butler draws attention here to the possible connections between her work and Cavarero’s work:

“the uniqueness of the Other is exposed to me, but mine is also exposed to her, and this does not mean we are the same, but only that we are bound to one another by what differentiates us, namely, our singularity.”

(Butler 2001, p.25)

It is these concepts of relationality, vulnerability and uniqueness that form the foundation for the study’s methodological and theoretical frameworks.

In adopting these theoretical frameworks, I view them as heuristic devices rather than rigid instructions. Lawler usefully explains this way of approaching theory;

“[t]here are many theoretical perspectives with which we work within sociology (and other disciplines) that are not testable using 'scientific' methods. What we tend to look for in such theories are ways of understanding, appraising and interpreting the world. The point is not can we prove them? but are they useful to think with?”

(Lawler 2008, p.78)

Taking these theorists together and thinking with them allows me to explore the tensions that are of interest to this study. On the one hand, there is the idea that people construct their identity as they move through their lives and that they draw on narrative as a meaning-making process in this. However, on the other hand, there are the numerous conditions and limits that shape the boundaries of those narratives. I am interested in the notion of uniqueness and the liberating idea that each individual has their own

unrepeatable story that they live out as they move through the world. However, tied up with this is the knowledge that the conditions of possibility of this story are determined by one's dependence on the other and by the power of dominant social discourses. It is this friction that interests me, the struggle to find one's own unique story within the powerful social story that dominates our frames of meaning. Vulnerability to the other can be a sustaining force if it is built on an openness and mutual respect for alternative ways of being. But it can also be a much less benign force, curtailing our stories within that which has previously been deemed thinkable and doable. It is within the tension between the unique story and the dominant script that the struggle to create an identity and find a coherent sense of self plays out.

In summary then, the study's theoretical framework adopts a narrative understanding of identity as in the work of Adriana Cavarero, meaning that people are seen as unique and unrepeatable individuals who nevertheless are dependent on their relation to the other in order to bring coherence to the fragmented narratives of their being. It is understood that we cannot step outside our own stories and view them as an objective observer. Identity is thus always subjective and our knowledge of ourselves is always partial. This necessary relationality to the other means that we are always vulnerable to others and dependent on them in order for us to make meaning of ourselves. To this understanding of identity as a narrative process I add Butler's understanding of identity as a performative process, in which the limits of our identities are shaped by powerful discourses that determine what behaviours are acceptable and in which our performance of identities within these limits act to reinforce or reinterpret dominant discourses. Anchoring the study within this theoretical framework provides for a nuanced exploration of teacher identity, in the understanding that "it is through the interrelation between discourse and narrative that the discursive construction of desirability is produced" (Tamboukou & Livholts 2015, p.81). The framework allows for questions of how coherence is brought to the narrative of a teacher's professional life-course; how relationality informs teacher identity narratives; how policy and other contextual factors operate as discursive forces within teacher identity narratives; and how, in turn, teachers interpret, enact, and renegotiate discourses according to their own narratives of professional identity.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined some of the key themes, issues and concepts in the national and international empirical and theoretical literature that form the foundation for the discussion of the study's findings and the development of its core argument. Within the empirical research literature on teacher identity, the study is informed by the idea that teacher identity is a process and that the life-course and narrative perspectives on teacher identity are key to understanding this process. Alongside these ideas, the literature on the operation of affect in teacher identity and on the concept of 'learnification' and its effects on teacher professionalism and identity act as touchstones for the discussion of the study's findings. Closely related to these themes, the research literature on the relationship between education change and teacher identity provides a lens for the discussion of the study's participants' experiences of education change over the course of their careers and points to the need to consider the affective domain, in particular vulnerability, within education policy processes. The chapter also outlined some findings and suggestions in the empirical literature on post-primary teacher identity that were particular to the profession in the Irish context. These will be drawn on to provide context for the discussion of the teacher identity narratives of the research participants.

Finally, the chapter provided an overview of the theoretical literature on identity that informs the study's theoretical framework, starting with a brief discussion of the feminist theoretical tradition's approach to the study of identity and then detailing the aspects of the work of Adriana Cavarero and Judith Butler that form the basis for the study's theoretical framework. The next chapter will outline the study's methodology and will indicate the ways in which this theoretical framework aligns itself with the ontological and epistemological position of the researcher. The chapter will draw on the discussion of the theoretical work of Cavarero and Butler in justifying its research approach and the design of the research method and the framework for analysis.

Chapter 4

Research Methodology

1. Introduction

The study's theoretical framework, with its commitment to openness and complexity, was the principal foundation in designing the research methodology. The choice of research approach and the design of the research method and analytic method developed from this framework and were refined so as to sit within its philosophical positioning. This chapter will begin by discussing the study's ontological and epistemological positions and the manner in which these positions both inform and are informed by my interpretation of the theoretical work of Adriana Cavarero and Judith Butler. Arising from the discussion of the ontology and epistemology and its relationship with the theoretical framework, the following section will justify the research approach and method chosen for the study. This section will also include some detail on the sampling process and a discussion of the ethical considerations pertaining to the study. The final section on the methodology outlines the method for analysis and indicates the manner in which the study's theoretical and methodological frameworks influenced the design of the analytic method. The chapter will conclude with an introduction to each of the eight research participants whose narratives form the second part of the dissertation.

2. Ontology and Epistemology

The study's theoretical framework, as outlined in the previous chapter, draws on feminist theory and, in particular, on the work of Adriana Cavarero and of Judith Butler. Their respective theories of identity influence the study's approach to understanding teacher identity as an enmeshment of the spheres of the self and of the social. In exploring this dynamic, the theoretical framework draws heavily on these theorists'

conceptualisations of relationality and the points of intersection where their work can be brought into conversation around ideas of vulnerability, interdependence and the recognition of the other. The choice to engage with these particular theoretical traditions arises from the ontological and epistemological positions which will be discussed below. The commitment to these positions necessitated choosing theoretical frameworks that would allow for a research design that is rooted in complexity and an openness to plurality, a commitment which aligned itself well with the work of both Cavarero and Butler. It is also the case, however, that while the central assumptions of the study's philosophical commitments remained constant, the ontological and epistemological frameworks were refined and developed through the engagement with the theoretical literature. The development of the methodology was, then, a dynamic process in which the study's established positions remained open to the challenges contained within the theoretical literature.

This research is firmly rooted in the assumption that our understanding of ourselves, of our lives and of the world around us is socially constructed. However, in adopting epistemological frameworks based on this premise, I do not align my ontological position to either side of a binary understanding of existence, to one side or the other of a line between objective reality and social construction. Rather, I argue that, just because our knowledge of the world is socially constructed, that does not automatically mean that the world itself is a social construction nor that it does not exist independently of our human understanding. In this, I am in agreement with Arendt when she observes that, “[the world] transcends our life-span into past and future alike; it was there before we came and will outlast our brief sojourn in it” (2000, p.203).

I do acknowledge, however, that the world as humanity experiences it is a world that is always already interpreted and that this world is unknowable to us outside of our socially constructed understanding of it. We cannot access an indisputable truth of what the world is and I reject, thus, a positivist stance that would claim that the world can be known in its objective reality. Our knowledge can only be subjective and can only be constructed through a subjective interpretation of our existence in the world. Similarly, to argue that our understanding of ourselves is subjective and contingent on social constructions does not necessarily mean that the self does not exist outside of this socially constructed understanding. Cavarero's conceptualisation of the individual as a

unique and irreplaceable existence is helpful here because it allows for an understanding of the self as ontologically singular and epistemologically subjective (2000).

Of course, “the identity of social science can no longer be formulated [only] as a critique of positivism” (Delanty 2005, p.97), given that the natural sciences themselves have also shifted away from positivism towards a more nuanced view of the world. I am aware that it is not enough to simply position my methodological stance as a rejection of positivism and that it must take a more complex perspective than a straightforward positivist / post-positivist binary opposition. Thus, the core principle shaping the study’s framework is a rejection of the objective/subjective binary. I accept that there may be an objective, ontologically real, world but I contend that, epistemologically, all knowledge is subjective and that an objective reality remains thus beyond our limits of comprehension or representation. This rejection of binaries in favour of more nuanced ontologies and epistemologies is becoming increasingly accepted across the social and natural sciences, for example in the work of the neo-materialists. While this study is not located within that field, its epistemological framework must acknowledge such developments and the move they represent away from binary understandings of knowledge and existence.

The study adopts a view of individual reality as subjective, known only to us, and, in the end, unique to each of us. And yet, unique though it is, it is constructed in interaction with elements of a social reality that relies on the connections between us. Thus, even in the uniqueness of our interpretations of reality, we rely on the interpretations of others. The question that arises from this is how we live the experience of being a unique self within a socially constructed world. The study thus seeks to explore the processes by which individuals negotiate and construct their individual and social reality and the ways in which power and agency are expressed and experienced within those processes. Butler’s theories of performativity are useful here in highlighting how our selves and our understanding of our selves are dependent on the world in which we live, on the prior meanings, interpretations and definitions that have been constructed by generations of people, and on the discourses and structures through which we understand our lived experience (Butler 1999; 1990).

What, then, does this view of knowledge mean for the theoretical frameworks shaping this research study? Firstly, the core tenet upon which the epistemological framework of the study rests is that objective reality is unknowable because the limits of

our knowledge cannot extend beyond the subjectiveness of our being in the world. Secondly, because knowledge is a social and subjective construct, truth is also a social and subjective construct and is therefore experienced differently by each individual. Following on from this, it is impossible for any piece of social research to arrive at an answer that will stand as indisputably and objectively real and true regardless of time, context and place. Equally, in regard to research in the social sciences, analysis cannot arrive at a single truth or objective social reality but only at an interpretation of the socially constructed world as it operates according to a particular perspective in a particular time and place. Accepting this requires a “problematization of the relationship between epistemology, methodology and the reporting of research” in recognition that, “it may never be possible to capture and faithfully recreate experience totally, that there are multiple realities, and various ways of telling the 'same' story” (Sikes & Everington 2001, pp.13-14).

Thus, rather than striving to arrive at any single definitive truth, what this research aims to do is to explore the processes and means by which the research participants construct that which is true to them. That these are subjective truths is not seen as a weakness of the study because, building on the epistemological framework outlined above, there can only *ever* be subjective truths. To claim that a piece of social research can arrive at an objective truth is to adopt the theoretically unsound position of presuming that the objective reality of the world can be known through the inescapably subjective lens of human existence. Rather, in this understanding, “knowledge is less about knowing reality than about [...] a reflexive relation to the world in which reality is shaped by cognitive practices, structures and processes” (Delanty & Strydom 2003, p. 10).

A key thought structuring the frameworks of the study is this rejection of a binary divide between the self and the social. In line with Arendt’s concept of ‘natality’ (2000; 1958) and with Cavarero’s thoughts on ‘irreplaceability’ (2000), the study proceeds in the understanding that each individual is unique, a self that cannot be exactly replicated. However, as is the case with the idea of an objective world, this self is unknowable as an objective entity. It can only be known through the socially constructed interpretations of our lived experiences. In other words, the self can only ever be partially and subjectively known. This is the core philosophy of this study, this rejection of certainties and binaries and the embrace, instead, of uncertainties and

pluralities. I do not use the word ‘embrace’ casually here but rather with the sentiment that the uncertainty of knowledge and the plurality of being *is* to be embraced, to be cherished. It is the uncertainty in the balance between the self and the social that causes us to be in this state of constant flux, negotiating our being in the world and reconstructing our understanding of that being in a search for a coherent sense of self, an uncertainty that some would argue is what makes us most alive. Indeed, Lovell uses the word ‘celebrate’ in writing of this uncertainty: “[p]oststructuralist and postmodernist discourses celebrate flexible selves, permeable or semi-permeable boundaries, the journey traversed rather than origins or lasting determinations” (2000, p.30).

Acknowledging this limitation of the extent of our knowledge is necessary but also freeing. By simply accepting that both truth and reality are subjective experiences, we can turn our energy away from the unanswerable question of whether something is or isn’t true and focus instead on how it comes to be *positioned* as true. This assumption is at the core of the study, whereby it does not aim to evaluate the rightness or wrongness of people’s understandings but rather to investigate the processes by which those understandings come to be their truth. Following Cavarero, and building on Todd’s (2011) development of Cavarero’s theory, the study embraces openness and plurality as a precondition to living ethically in the world as a unique existence together with the multiplicity of unique and unknowable others.

This commitment to openness is necessary because a piece of social research can only ever arrive at a limited understanding of a particular person, context or phenomenon. The understanding will be limited because that is all that we, as humans, can ever apprehend. To claim otherwise, to claim that we can fully understand or know something, in the sense of the positivist empiricist scientific tradition, is to claim a power that is not available to us. As outlined in Chapter 3, in feminist theory this is not seen as a weakness, but rather as a necessary acknowledgement that the world is too complex to define. And it is indeed this acknowledgement of complexity, of unknowability, that is one of the strengths of the feminist theoretical perspective. It ensures that research in this tradition remains open to nuance and to uncertainty, resists closing off alternative paths of meaning, and respects the individual within the research process.

3. Research Approach

Research paradigm

The study's research approach was chosen based on the theoretical and philosophical positions described above. The study is located in the interpretive research paradigm and is aligned with the feminist theoretical perspective, within which it is influenced in particular by the narrative fields in the feminist tradition. The interpretive research tradition seeks to explore the processes of meaning-making within people's lived experience. This research tradition draws attention to the interplay between individual interpretations of meaning and "deeply embedded cultural and linguistic symbols" which serve to "shape the legitimate boundaries of action" (Alford 1998, p. 85). The current study sits well within such a research tradition, given that it interrogates individual teacher identities within their social, cultural and political contexts.

Given that the study's focus of investigation is teacher identity and that the theoretical frameworks supporting this investigation are rooted in an understanding of both knowledge and identity as subjective and unstable, a research method from within the qualitative paradigm is an appropriate choice. A quantitative research method, while I acknowledge the value of such approaches, does not suit this particular study's interest in the nuance of identity work nor its commitment to openness. The study aims to explore processes and to illustrate complexity. In line with Cavarero's theory, I am interested in the unique 'who' rather than the generalisable 'what' (Biesta 2016; Cavarero & Bertolino 2008; Cavarero 2000). This calls for a research approach that allows for thick description (Geertz 1973) and makes room for plurality rather than trying to condense differences into categories. Quantitative methods can certainly be valuable in identifying trends and phenomena and can usefully highlight questions or problems that merit investigation and attention. For this reason, I am wary of rejecting quantitative methods outright, aware that, "[a]ll too many critical and postmodern researchers [...] have too easily assumed that any statistical questions and representations by definition must be positivist" and that such an opposition can lead "to a partial deskilling of an entire generation of critically-oriented researchers who, when confronted with quantitative analyses, simply reject them out of hand" (Apple 1996, p. 127). Thus, rather than engaging in an either/or opposition of quantitative and

qualitative research, I see each as having merits which usefully complement the other. In adopting a qualitative approach for this particular study, I align myself with Goodson and Sikes' observation that, "qualitative information is essential, both in its own right and also in order to make full and proper use of quantitative indicators" (2001, p.xi). For example, in the case of this study, the depth and nuance allowed for by the research approach makes it possible to unpack some of the particularities of teacher identity in the Irish context, such as the effects of the low levels of collegiality identified by the TALIS 2008 study (OECD 2009), thus bringing a close qualitative eye to a quantitatively identified issue.

In this study, in order to try to gain some understanding of the processes involved in people's negotiation of their identities, it is necessary to adopt an approach that looks intensively at a limited number of individuals. Of course, the findings arrived at through such an approach cannot claim to be generalisable or to offer objective certainty about the nature of a particular problem. They cannot "assign the particular [person/phenomenon] to various groups [...] so as to arrive at an overall probability high enough to predict from" (Hollis 1994, p.41), as quantitative research can aim to do. However, this is not to be seen as a weakness but rather as a strength of a qualitative approach, whereby the aims of the research are quite different to some of the aims that quantitative research might have. Quantitative research is useful in collecting large-scale information but the information it produces about people can take the form of "a sort of empirical life without a story" (Cavarero 2000, p.37). This study aims to interrogate the stories of people's professional lives and to set those stories within their personal and political contexts.

Thus, rather than using "quantitative methods that objectively use correlations to describe and understand 'what people do'", this study uses "qualitative approaches that attempt to 'generate a subjective understanding of *how* and *why* people perceive, reflect, role-take, interpret, and interact'" (Patricia & Peter Adler, cited in Baker & Edwards 2012, p.4, emphasis in original). As I have discussed in some detail, the study is rooted in an understanding of reality as subjective. Given that the study's ontological and epistemological frameworks embrace the ideas of uncertainty and plurality, a quantitative approach aiming for generalisable conclusions would be a poor match for both the theoretical framework and the research aims of the study. The aim is not to identify or describe characteristics or categories of identity but to arrive at some

understanding of how an identity is constructed and how the individual draws on the narratives that make up their reality to arrive at a version of the self that offers them a feeling of truth and coherence. It is thus clear that a qualitative research approach is the most appropriate choice. The following section will describe the design and use of the particular research method chosen from amongst those methods appropriate to a qualitative approach.

Research method

The study's framework is formed with the idea that, as Alford argues, "[a] combination of different theoretical claims coupled with multiple kinds of evidence allows the construction of powerful arguments in social inquiry" (1998, p.120). The research method I am using is shaped by the fields of narrative inquiry and of life history but rather than sitting within either of those fields, it is at the boundaries, borrowing from each field in a way that builds towards a method that best fits the study's theoretical framework. The use of these methodological perspectives in empirical research on teacher identity has been discussed in the literature review, where the work of various researchers that have informed this study's understanding of teacher identity was highlighted. I am aware that these fields represent research methods, modes of analysis *and* theoretical stances and, while I am discussing them in this section that is specific to method, their influence does of course run through the entire methodology.

I am using an interviewing method that is informed by life history interviewing and by narrative inquiry, particularly in the sense that I maintain an openness in the interview structure to allow for the participant to tell their identity story in a way that makes sense to them, rather than forcing them into a predetermined structure based on a list of topics or issues that may seem important to the researcher. This position stems from the study's theoretical commitment towards openness and recognition of voice, as emphasised by Cavarero (Forrest 2015; Cavarero 2000).

The field of life history is a foundational touchstone in the design of the research method. As Sikes and Everington explain,

“[t]here is no universal definition but basically a life history is a story that someone tells about his or her life, the account that they give about things that have happened to them, set within a wider context.”

(Sikes & Everington 2001, p.9)

The study is well suited to such an approach, given that it is precisely the story of individual lives in wider contexts that I am interested in. The potential within the life history approach for unpacking the “dynamic interaction between human agency and hegemonic forces” (Munro 1998, p.9) is a further reason to align the study with this field.

However, the design of the framework through which the interview narratives are analysed means that the research does not fit wholly within a life history approach. The level of interpretation and critique that I bring to the interview narratives as I analyse them means that it is impossible to remove myself as researcher from the process and to say simply, “this is how this person’s life was”. Furthermore, a pure life history approach would not fit with the research aims, which require a measure of active interpretation that moves outside the framing of a traditional life history approach.

The most influential approach in the design of this study’s research method is that of narrative inquiry. In particular, this study has been informed by the focus that the field of narrative inquiry brings to the individuality of the person: “[i]n the grand narrative, *the universal case* is of prime interest. In narrative thinking, *the person* in context is of prime interest” (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, p.32, emphasis in original). Work within the narrative inquiry field demonstrates the potential of embracing uncertainty and plurality, and the benefit of openness in the research process. The study’s epistemological framework is very much influenced by work in the narrative field, with its emphasis on the subjectivity and conditionality of knowledge. The ethical commitments of narrative inquiry to uniqueness of voice also fit well with the study’s theoretical framework:

“[i]n formalist inquiry, people are looked at as exemplars of a form - of a theory, an idea, a social category. In narrative inquiry, people are looked at as embodiments of lived stories.”

(Clandinin & Connelly 2000, p.43)

This idea, that people might be positioned as “exemplars of a form” in certain types of research has echoes of Cavarero’s criticism of the reduction of people’s stories to a ‘what’ story, where they represent categories or types (2000, pp.55-65). She emphasises rather the singularity of people’s stories, the idea that each person represents a unique ‘who’ in the world, a focus that aligns itself with Clandinin and Connelly’s suggestion that narrative inquiry emphasises the idea of people as “embodiments of lived stories”.

It is, however, necessary to emphasise that this study, while acknowledging its debt to narrative inquiry, cannot claim to be a work of pure narrative inquiry. It is of course impossible to draw strict boundaries between research approaches and this study does not attempt to do so. Certainly, its theoretical framework is firmly located in a narrative theory of identity. However, narrative theory and narrative inquiry are not necessarily the same thing. While it would have been possible to adapt the study's research approach to fit more firmly within the field of narrative inquiry, it was decided to remain at the boundaries of the field.

This was in part because the more creative and innovative methods associated with narrative inquiry can become inauthentic unless they are a natural fit for both the study and the researcher. Furthermore, I was wary of the risk of moving myself as researcher more into the centre of the study. Of course, researcher reflexivity and subjectivity cannot be written out of any research and must be acknowledged and taken account of in the design of theoretical and methodological frameworks. Indeed, there are times when having the researcher more centrally within the research is an appropriate fit, for example when the researcher is part of an action research project, or when the research is exploring a phenomenon of which the researcher is very much part. However, in the case of this study, the research topic does not necessarily call for such an extended focus on the researcher but rather on the identity narratives of the participants themselves.

The study is informed in particular by the valuable sense of ethical relationality that narrative inquiry brings to the research process, from which many other fields of research stand to learn a great deal. However, locating this study more centrally within the field would potentially lead to some dissonance between its theoretical positioning and some of the core principles of the field. The study remains thus at the edges of the field of narrative inquiry but, in the design of its research approach and method, explicitly acknowledges its debt to that field.

Research instrument

Within the qualitative research paradigm, long-form interviews emerged as the most suitable research instrument to address the research questions framing the study, given that they fit well with the research paradigm, with the theoretical framework, and

with the research aims. Interviews involve directly addressing teachers themselves and have been commonly used in education research:

“[t]he notion of the teacher's voice and the demand that it should be heard by, and in, the discourses of educational research and reform, has been central to teacher-focused research approaches.”

(MacLure 2010, p.100)

Because the study is interested in the negotiation of individual identity within and against broader contexts, a one-on-one engagement with the research participants could allow for the exploration of individual narratives in an in-depth way that, for example, focus groups would not allow for. Using interviews fits with the ethical foundation of the study in a respect for individual agency:

“the interview genre presupposes agency as it encompasses active, reflective, meaning-making, socialised individuals, who are able to reconcile themselves as individuals, separate from the environment and from other individuals.”

(Jokinen 2015, p.3)

The interviews would necessarily take an open approach, rather than being structured by a pre-determined list of questions set by the interviewer. This point is important in terms of tying the research method to the ideas within the theoretical framework around maintaining an openness to multiple ways of being and to complexity of meaning, as emphasised by Cavarero (2000). This aspect of the theoretical framework is also informed by Butler's argument that there is a certain “ethical violence” contained within the demand for “complete coherence of self-identity” (2001, p. 27).

It is important for a study that is rooted in this commitment to openness and uncertainty to carry that commitment through to the design of the research instrument. This means not choosing an instrument that defines in advance the topics to be discussed nor one that creates a template to which the narratives should adhere. Thus, the interview uses a single opening question aimed at eliciting the participant's narrative of their teaching life and any subsequent questions are based on the response to this initial question. The interviews thus take the form of a narrative and are ordered in such a way, not necessarily temporally or sequentially, but in the order of a reflective narrative or life story. This approach to interviewing is based on the work of life historians and narrative inquirers such as Ivor Goodson and Jean Clandinin and, in particular, on the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) developed by Tom

Wengraf. BNIM is useful because it highlights the importance of paying attention not just to what is said but to the order in which it is said. It brings into focus both the narrative of a person's life story and also the narrative of the interview itself (Wengraf 2001). In a review of qualitative research methods, Julia Brannen says that she "found this interviewing technique a refreshing departure involving a move away from asking lots of questions and probes to one of seeking more stories" (Moss *et al.* 2014, p.179). According to Stoilova *et al.*, who used BNIM interviewing in their research on relationships, the emphasis on the participant's own narrative means that

"[i]n contrast to a traditional semi-structured interview, this method allows much greater space for the relationship meanings of the interviewee to emerge spontaneously and to be understood, *in vivo*, within the context of the overall biographical-narrative that they offered."

(Stoilova *et al.* 2014, p.1078)

This type of narrative interviewing sits well with the theoretical framework discussed above because it allows for an openness to the emergence of the research participants' narratives and emphasises the uniqueness of each of those narratives. It is not necessary in this approach that the interview take a chronologically structured form or that there be a coherent logic or rationality shaping the story. Butler's observation is useful in justifying this approach;

"if we require that someone be able to tell in story form the reasons why his or her life has taken the path it has, that is, to be a coherent autobiographer it may be that we prefer the seamlessness of the story to something we might tentatively call the truth of the person."

(Butler 2001, p.34)

Given this study's alertness to and embrace of uncertainty, it is clear that "seamlessness" of narrative would not be an appropriate aim of the research interviews. The study is not looking for the reasons that a person's professional life has, in Butler's words, "taken the path it has". Rather, it is the manner in which storying is used by people to negotiate and interpret their identities that is of interest. In this understanding of narration as negotiation, there is the potential within the telling of a person's life story as a narrative for an exploration of the discourses that structure that story and for the ways in which those structures are negotiated and reinterpreted.

As Cavarero argues in her book 'Relating Narratives' (2000), the desire for one's own story is one of the key driving forces that gives meaning to individual lives. In this light, the interview itself can be viewed as a sense-making exercise where the individual

gathers together the strands of their own narrative to construct the story of their life as they understand it to be. Of course, in Cavarero's discussion, the concept of recognition by the other is a key aspect and, in the examples she draws on, it is the hearing of one's life story being narrated by the other that is central to self-understanding. However, while accepting entirely that this is the case, I would build on Cavarero's work in arguing that the recognition of the self as an entity in relation to the other occurs both in the hearing *and* in the telling of one's story. The opportunity to have one's voice heard, to have a space into which to speak, is essential to one's perception of oneself as an individual with a story worth living. Thus, as the individual tells their story to someone, the process of articulating their story for an audience acts as an element in the broader construction of their narrative of the self. Naturally, such opportunities arise in various ways, formally and informally, throughout the life-course. The research interview is just one of these opportunities and, indeed, a minor and not particularly noteworthy opportunity as such. However, to ignore that it can play such a role, however small, is to set it aside from the flow of life, to attempt to make it a sterile and contained event, an attempt which is entirely at odds with the both the epistemological framework and the ethical position of this study. The interview is thus not seen merely as an information-gathering tool to which the research participant is subject but also as an element in itself of the participant's agentic sense-making of their identity.

The opening question of the interview, taken from the biographic-narrative method, does not set a strictly defined structure for the narrative of identity that is to follow. It asks, "tell me the story of your life as a teacher, start wherever you wish, and include any experiences or times or events that are important to you personally". Following such an opening question, although many participants start chronologically, interviews very quickly take on varying sequences and structures, and the resulting narratives are each unique in their form as well as in their content. In keeping with the BNIM philosophy (Wengraf 2001) and also with Cavarero's view of the importance of narrative, it is not seen as merely arbitrary that each interview should follow a unique sequence and structure. Rather, the interview is seen as part of the ongoing process of identity-making, whereby each of us is always engaged in the construction of a coherent sense of self. It must be emphasised here that I am not claiming that the interview is constructing the subject because, in keeping with the study's ontological stance, the subject exists before and independently of any engagement with the other, such as an

interview. I am, however, arguing that the interview acts as an element of the individual's ongoing construction of a narrative through which to understand and know themselves. In other words, it cannot be the case that an individual simply sits down to an interview and tells the story of their life in an entirely unreflective manner. Regardless of *what* the content of their interview says, *how* they tell their story speaks to their self-perception and to their manner of understanding their identity.

Fieldwork

The eight interviews analysed in the study took place over a period of fourteen months, from May 2016 to July 2017. During this time the study's methodological framework was continuously refined according to the themes emerging from the initial analyses. The average interview duration was two hours, with the shortest just under an hour and the longest almost three hours. At the outset of the interviewing phase, it had been estimated that the interviews would last 90 minutes at most. This figure was based on two pilot interviews. While it is difficult to pinpoint exact reasons for the longer duration of the research interviews, it is likely due to a combination of the participants' profile and the researcher's increasing experience in interviewing. Of course, the longer than anticipated duration of the interviews yielded more data from each individual interview than had been expected and the effects of this on the sampling procedure is discussed below.

Initial contact was made with the participants through a number of avenues, including social media, adverts in teacher union magazines, emails to subject associations, acquaintances and word-of-mouth. Following a phone discussion about the study, the participants received the information sheet and consent form by email and, if they decided to proceed with the interview, an appointment was arranged. The majority of the interviews took place in hotels, with a further three taking place in the participant's home. Before the interview began, the participant's consent was obtained and their rights with regard to anonymity and the use of the data were clarified. The details around the recording and transcription of the interviews are discussed below in the section on Research Ethics.

Once the participants were comfortable, the interviews began with the question based on the BNIM interviewing method, which asked the participants to tell me the story of their life as a teacher, and explained that I would base my questions on their

response. This opening question had the effect of letting the participant choose the sequence and content of the interview and, because it explicitly asked for a story, it relieved the participants of the pressure of feeling there would be a list of pre-decided questions to which they had to have informed answers. This way of beginning the interview, while perhaps seeming quite bald, resulted in initial responses of up to thirty minutes during which many of the participants focused on issues that I would not necessarily have included had I prepared a schedule of questions. The rest of the interview then took the form of an open discussion around topics stemming from the response to the initial question.

Research sample

The study, in line with the research methodology outlined above, used a small sample size. This is in accordance with the qualitative research paradigm and with the life history and narrative inquiry traditions by which the research method is influenced. Given that the study aims to gather in-depth information and thick description about individuals' lifeworlds, it is necessary to engage the research participants in an interview that is long-form and detailed. To carry out such interviews with a large sample would be unfeasible given the restrictions of time and expense. Of course, using a small sample is not simply a decision influenced by necessity, it is also firmly in line with the theoretical framework guiding the study. As has been discussed, the study does not aim to offer generalisable conclusions or to allocate people to broad categories or types. Rather, the study is interested in examining teacher identity at the individual level. In line with Cavarero, the study starts from an understanding of each individual as a unique existence. This necessarily means that each individual's identification processes will be unique. An attempt to bring a large scale study into line with this theoretical framework would necessarily involve some elision of individual variousness and would diminish the focus on the unique that is such a core concept in Cavarero's work. Furthermore, one of the study's intents has a theoretical focus in that it is exploring the usefulness of adopting a feminist theoretical framework in understanding the relationship between policy and professional identity. This means that the focus is less on arriving at scalable and generalisable outcomes than on a nuanced and detailed analysis of process and theory.

The study's sampling approach and size was informed by previous research in the education field, such as Sykes' PhD study, whereby feminist post-structural theory and a life history method "illustrated how [...] six PE teachers accepted and resisted identities as "lesbian" and "heterosexual" throughout their lives" (Sykes 2001, p.14). The sample size aimed for a minimum of eight and a maximum of twelve participants. These figures were chosen so as to be in line with reviews in the international literature of sample size in qualitative research. The concept of saturation was of particular relevance in this. In one of the reviews on sample size, Guest *et al.* (2006) identify seven as the number of participants at which saturation starts to occur. In another paper Mason (2010) describes the result of a review of doctoral research carried out across disciplines in UK universities that identified itself as using a qualitative approach (n=560). In this review, it is suggested that between fifteen and thirty was a typical sample size, but with the sample being somewhat smaller for life history research, indeed several studies had a sample of one. Baker and Edwards' summary of such advice is useful:

"Mason writes that it is often a 'knee-jerk' response for the inexperienced researcher to want to conduct more interviews because this is somehow seen as 'better'. [He] also identifies the need within qualitative research to build a convincing analytical narrative based on 'richness, complexity and detail' rather than on statistical logic."

(Baker & Edwards 2012, p.5)

The exact nature of the research sample was not fixed at the beginning of the project but evolved with the study itself. Initially, the intention was to include teachers from a span of generational cohorts in order to examine whether there were differences between the cohorts in terms of their interpretations of teacher identity and the way they engaged with education policy. I had intended comparing and contrasting across these cohorts and identifying themes relating to age and experience, as well as illustrating how the recent history of post-primary education in Ireland could be divided into eras or timespans that would relate to changes in education policy and the development of particular types of teacher identity.

However, as the research progressed, the focus of the study shifted towards a more critical position informed by the feminist theoretical tradition of examining and critiquing the operation of power on macro and micro levels. The initial sample design began to shift out of alignment with the study's emerging theoretical framework. The idea of comparing and contrasting individuals' identity according to generational

cohorts did not fit with the evolution of the ontological and epistemological position of the study. Rather than taking a perspective of each individual's existence as unique and unrepeatable, such a sample design would have had the effect of flattening out individual characteristics in order to place people into categories. It would very much risk being an example of prioritising the 'what' over the 'who', a position rejected by both Arendt and Cavarero. In a similar way, it emerged very quickly that age was quite an arbitrary way to divide and group people, and that disparities and similarities crossed these boundaries to an extent that they started to blur organically.

It became clear also that the study's reoriented focus on the processes involved in the construction of a coherent narrative of the self over the course of a life required that the participants would have *experienced* a life, that is, that they would have had a substantial length of professional teaching life behind them. While the study does align itself with Cavarero's understanding of moments as the key to constructing a life narrative, the study's focus on the interaction of policy and identity necessitated that there be a *range* of moments, both temporally and contextually, in each participant's narrative.

In their work on teacher identity, Jupp and Slattery defend their choice to limit their sample to experienced teachers:

“[w]e raise the question: Why are we studying predominantly preservice teachers' identities, especially if those are the identities we want to change? The [...] studies should, through purposive sampling, research professional identifications of teachers experienced in working through difference.”

(Jupp & Slattery 2012, p.307)

This argument became more relevant to the study as the literature review progressed and evolved along with the recent literature in the field of education in Ireland. Since 2014 (when the study was first designed), the vast majority of papers published on teacher identity in Ireland have focused on student and newly qualified teachers (n=14) with only one paper on veteran teachers, although this also related to initial teacher education. Thus, for all of these reasons, i.e. the need for an in-depth and nuanced approach, the incongruence of a sample based on generational comparisons with the theoretical framework, the necessity for the participants to have had some length of experience, and the lack of research on mid- to late-career teachers in Ireland, it became clear that the sample would need to be more narrowly focused.

A purposive sampling approach was thus used to recruit participants, male and female, who were qualified post-primary teachers with at least 20 years' experience of teaching. The reasons for using a purposive sampling technique echo those given by Moloney, who invited people to be participants in her research based on the fact that "they were 'information rich', offering useful information and insights to the phenomenon of interest" (2010, p.175). A snowball sampling approach was used based on the initial contacts made through the advertised avenues and through acquaintances and word-of-mouth.

The study does not claim that the sample is representative. Indeed, this was never the intention and would not fit with the study's theoretical framework. However, in the latter phases of the recruitment process, purposive sampling was again used to ensure that there was some variety within the sample. The sample thus aimed to include men and women whose experience varied in terms of school type, career path and location. Teachers who had recently retired were included in the sample. While this had not been the intention initially, it quickly emerged that, due to a swathe of early retirement takers in recent years, to exclude teachers who had left the profession would exclude a number of people whose contribution to the research could be substantial. Indeed, in many cases, it was precisely the reasons behind their early retirement that made their professional narratives so interesting.

4. Framework for Analysis

Tamboukou and Livholts observe that "doing discourse and narrative analysis is not a matter of following strict guidelines, but of engaging creatively in developing a methodological framework for analysis" (2015, p.19). The analytic framework for this study follows this in order to build a framework that can bring attention to the interplay of the macro and micro in the identity narratives of the participants. A key concept in the study's analytic process is the idea of the "exemplary moment", that is, the parts of a person's life narrative that serve as anchoring points for the coherence of the narrative as a whole. This could be a particular time period in a person's life that, to them, represents a crisis, an affirmation or a turning point. Such moments are useful for examining the ways in which dominant discourses and powerful narratives operate to

influence a person's narrative of self. This approach of considering exemplary moments within stories builds on the work of Arendt and Cavarero, as explained by Julia Kristeva in one of her series of lectures on Arendt:

“[t]he art of narrative resides in the ability to condense the action into an exemplary moment, to extract it from the continuous flow of time, and reveal a *who*.”

(Kristeva 2001, p.17, emphasis in original)

The method upon which the study's interview design is based, BNIM, does offer an analytic framework, which is based on the idea of tracing a person's subjectivity through the phases of their life story and also through the phases of the interview narrative. This study, however, while using an interview structure loosely based on BNIM, does not use the BNIM analytic process because it draws heavily on psychosocial theory, a field within which the study does not explicitly locate itself.

In keeping with the study's methodological and theoretical frameworks, the framework for analysis is rooted in the idea of multiple perspectives and is attentive to the rejection of binaries and of an either/or view of the world. In understanding this multi-perspective approach, it is helpful to consider Stephen Ball's metaphor of the theoretical toolbox (Serpieri *et al.* 2014; Ball 1994). This is the idea of one's research being informed by multiple and various concepts, theories, and processes, or 'tools', each of which can be useful in its own right but with which one can attempt and achieve more if used in conjunction with other tools. Ball uses this metaphor in describing the approach he and his colleagues took to a study on policy enactment in post-primary schools in England, where he and his co-authors brings together policy analysis, critical discourse analysis, interviews, observations, and various theoretical stances to give an in-depth account of policy enactment processes that is rich in detail and critique (Maguire *et al.* 2015; Braun *et al.* 2011a; 2011b). While not directly following Ball's analytic steps, the framework which is outlined below takes its cue from his considered, multi-layered approach.

The process for analysis of the research data proceeded in two stages, each of which will be described in the following sections. While these stages are described separately, they did not occur sequentially as neatly separated entities but rather as iterative and interlinked processes, each of which informed the other at different points. This idea of analysis as an ongoing process which is continually refined and reoriented fits with the theoretical foundation of the study and its adherence to a view of reality as

fluid, subjective, and contextually contingent. Of course, while the formal analysis is based on these two steps, the process of analysing began sooner than that. Germeten contends that analysis starts with the first listening back of the interview tape (2013, p. 616). Arguably, one could go further and say that analysis began during the course of the actual interviews themselves, given that the researcher carried out all the interviews and thus the process of interpretation was already ongoing during the conversations which formed the interviews. These initial acts of interpretation feed directly into the interview analysis because of the impossibility, particularly in open narrative interviews, of the researcher acting as an objective observer. The first step of analysis thus was the initial thoughts and responses of the researcher during and immediately after the interview. A note was made of these responses and these formed part of the body of analysis on which the findings and discussion are based. A final point to note in terms of the sequence of the analytic process is that, after the first interview, transcribing and analysis of earlier interviews took place alongside the later ones. This means that the emergent findings of each interview fed into and informed the researcher's stance *vis-à-vis* the content and interpretations of the subsequent interviews as they took place.

Stage one: narrative analysis

Stage one of the analysis was based on a narrative approach, in which the interview transcripts were read iteratively and interpreted as whole narratives, as opposed to being broken down into discrete pieces of data or codes. This type of close reading as analysis is based on work by Ivor Goodson (2013) on life history interviewing and by Clandinin and Connelly (2011) on narrative interviewing. Britzman also describes using such an analytic approach:

“I decided to study these data [...] as if I were reading a novel and, consequently, as if narratives of teaching were primarily a complex of contradictory interpretations and competing regimes of truth”

(Britzman, in St. Pierre & Pillow (eds.) 2000, p.31)

It is important to remember that I am not interested in some notion of the analysis uncovering the ‘true self’ of the research participant, nor in evaluating whether their interpretations and recollections are factually correct. Indeed, to attempt to do so would contradict the study's theoretical and epistemological frameworks. As Germeten points out in discussing her analysis of life history narratives: “it is not interesting to verify the

stories being told [...] there is no wrong/right answer when people tell you about their lives” (2013, p.616).

In terms of theoretical and conceptual anchors, the analysis done from this perspective ties in with Cavarero’s ideas around “exemplary moments”, the notion that there are certain moments within a life-course narrative upon which one’s identity hangs, and that these moments can sometimes come to represent key facets of a person’s understanding of their identity:

“the desire for unity that the narratable self manifests does occasionally translate itself as the conviction that there is a moment in which one's entire destiny, or rather one's entire story, can be summarised.”

(Cavarero 2000, p.43)

This phase of analysis, then, aimed to pick out and explore what some such exemplary moments might be in the research participants’ biographic narratives and examined the contexts and discourses at play within them to attempt to understand what it is about these moments that causes them to take on this magnitude. On the other hand, there may be moments that, while appearing to be objectively insignificant, take on significance in the telling of the narrative. It is these seemingly banal moments and the way in which the banal and the significant become entwined in the development of one’s narrative of identity that is of interest in the analysis.

The theoretical lens through which this analysis took place builds both on Cavarero’s narrative theories of identity (2015; 2008; 2000) and on Butler’s work on performativity and discourse (2010; 2004). Specifically, it was Cavarero’s understanding of identity as a search for a coherent narrative of the self that was of interest in this stage of the analysis. In terms of Butler’s theoretical influence, the analysis was informed by her attention both to the role of dominant discourses in setting the parameters for our understanding of our identity and also to the way in which we are ourselves active agents in the construction of these discourses. The analysis was also informed conceptually by Huberman’s (1993) work on the professional life-course of teachers, as discussed in the literature review, and particularly by his delineation of the phases through which teachers’ professional identities move as they progress through their career and life-course. These theoretical and conceptual influences were taken as foundations for the analytical framework.

Within stage one of the analysis the focus was on the narrative that emerges from the content of the interview, and particularly on the biographic narrative that is constructed from the content of the interview. The first step in the analytic process happened immediately after the interview, when field notes were made to record the researcher's initial thoughts and interpretations. These notes included references to points of tension or unease during the interview and also impressions of the style and manner of the participant's telling of their narrative. The second step in this process of analysis occurred simultaneously to the transcribing, which was carried out by the researcher. It was a conscious decision not to outsource the transcription, partly because it was unnecessary for such a small-scale study but principally because the act of transcribing the interviews was an opportunity for slow and careful engagement with the interviews that simply reading a prepared transcript could not provide. While transcribing, I added to the field notes already taken for each interview by noting questions, impressions and prompts that arose during the process, and that could be returned to at a later stage of analysis. As the interviews progressed, these notes included observations around similarities, differences and tensions between the interviews. Thus, by the time the principal element of this stage of analysis began, there was a bank of field notes and transcription notes already amassed for each interview.

For this stage of the analysis, the interview transcripts were read individually, as entities in themselves, and iteratively, as suggested by Goodson's life history work (Goodson 2013; Goodson & Sikes 2001). Extensive notes were made from those readings that included the events, anecdotes and experiences that feature in the interview narratives, the feelings and emotions that the participants reported experiencing at various points of the period discussed during the interviews, and any tensions or contradictions in the narratives. An additional strategy during this phase of the analysis was the construction of a timeline of the Irish and international educational context of the period covered by the participants' careers. The timeline included the key policy points, developments in social, cultural, political, and economic contexts, and any other changes or events considered relevant to the lifeworld of the interview participants. The narratives were read alongside this timeline and notes were made of the ways in which the individual biographic narratives were affected by contextual factors.

Stage two: thematic analysis

Where stage one of the analysis looked at the role of narrative in understanding identity, stage two of the analysis was more content-driven. It turned to the content of the interviews in terms of what the participants said about education and teaching, and anchored this data in the international literature on education with a view to coming to a deeper understanding of the concept of teacher professional identity. To do this it used a thematic approach, consisting of three-step coding and using MaxQDA software as an aid. As discussed in the introduction to the study's analytic framework, this represents an example of using a methodological toolbox, where, rather than choosing one approach or methodology over another, they are brought together in order to provide a fuller and richer perspective. By taking the interviews and approaching them through first one lens and then another, it was possible to arrive at a complex and nuanced understanding of the dynamics and multiple layers of interaction at work in the research participants' identities. By bringing each angle into focus at different stages, the same data can help to illuminate multiple processes at once, in all their contradictions and complexity.

Stage Two of the analysis was anchored conceptually in the work of Andy Hargreaves (2012; 2005; 2000) and of Judyth Sachs (2016; 2001) on teacher professionalism. It looked at how the concepts identified by those theorists as being central to teacher professionalism are interpreted and lived in the Irish context. As with the narrative analysis in Stage One, this analytic stage was also alert to the operation of discourses and performativity and builds in this again on the work of Judith Butler. The focus however shifted slightly, from the individual stories as stand-alone narratives to the social and political contextualisation of the collected narrative. This stage of analysis looked at the ways in which individuals' interpretations of identity intersected with the discursive context of their professional lives. It was interested particularly in the negotiations of meaning in the individual narratives and in how these meanings were echoed, contradicted or challenged across and between the collected narratives.

There was a balance to be struck, then, between reading the interview transcripts as discrete entities, as in stage one, and interrogating the co-constructed pattern of preoccupations across the collection of interviews, as in the second stage. In consciously shifting the focus back and forth between the individual's own story and the collected narrative, the socially situated nature of identity was highlighted. Attention

was drawn thus to ways in which individual narratives become enmeshed in the co-construction of a broader group narrative and to the interactive dynamics between the spheres of being that make up the social world.

The analysis was informed methodologically by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1999), whereby theories are deduced and drawn out from and through the data, rather than pre-existing as hypotheses to be tested (Creswell 2007; Maxwell 2009). A 3-step coding process using MaxQDA software was used for this analysis. The coding steps involved drawing out, in sequence, the topics, the concepts and the themes from the data.

The first step used descriptive coding to identify the topics that occurred and reoccurred within and across the interview transcripts. This step looked for the dominant preoccupations that arose during the interviews, rather than trying to identify every single topic of conversation. The topics were assigned at this stage to purely descriptive identifiers. There was no qualitative judgement or evaluation as such made at this step and the aim was rather simply to pick out the topics that arose multiple times, or if not multiple times, then in such a context as to be noteworthy.

The second step involved creating a further set of codes from the series of topics that resulted from the first step. This step of coding involved identifying concepts within the topics that were connected to the ideas of teacher professionalism and teacher identity. The analysis looked for ways in which these concepts appeared or were represented by the excerpts of interview transcript within the various topics. Unlike the first step of the coding process, which was more purely descriptive, this second step did involve evaluative judgement on the part of the researcher, as interpretations must be made in order to decide which particular concepts emerged most strongly from the data.

The third step in the coding process involved moving from discrete categories to overarching themes. Whereas the first two steps in the coding process involved dividing and subdividing the data into categories so as to look at them more closely, this third step involved stepping back to take a broader view again and, based on the topics and concepts that had been identified and on the manner in which they appeared together, identifying the emergent themes that operated across and between the various interviews. This step involved substantial interpretation on the researcher's part as the themes were not always immediately apparent. Turning again to the international literature, the analysis looked at whether the themes that emerged from the interviews

align themselves with the themes in the international research. The themes that emerged from this stage of the analysis were: autonomy; accountability; collegiality; status; voice; recognition; vulnerability; and responsibility. These themes were then set alongside those that emerged in stage one of the analysis, the narrative analysis stage, in order to arrive at a nuanced picture of the complexity of teacher identity. Theories were developed from this bringing together of the two stages of analysis through which to address the research aims.

5. Research Ethics and Limitations

Ethical considerations

The study has been approved by the Maynooth University Social Research Ethics Subcommittee and adheres to the guidelines issued by that committee. To safeguard the participants' privacy, their names and other details by which they may be recognised are anonymised. The participants retain the right to withdraw their participation at any time up to publication and they will be welcome at any stage to contact the researcher to access transcripts of their contribution and of any publications based on the research. To ensure the participants' confidentiality and privacy, all personal details gathered will be encrypted, kept in secure storage on Maynooth University's server and destroyed following completion of the research project. The recordings from which the transcripts were made were password-locked and stored securely and separately to the transcripts and to the personal details. They will also be destroyed following completion of the research project. The anonymised interview transcripts will be deposited in the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA), where their future use will be governed by the Archive's regulations.

Issues of researcher subjectivity and bias were considered at all stages of the study's design. As argued in the discussion of the study's epistemological position, it is impossible for knowledge to be objective and, as such, it is not possible to suggest that this study can be free of subjectivity. The choices of research tradition, theoretical framework and research method are all alert to the socially co-constructed and interpreted nature of knowledge in the research process. I am aware that, as a researcher and as a former member of the teaching profession, I am not an objective observer but a

value-laden participant in the process. Thus, while I acknowledge the impossibility of standing outside the research, I remain conscious of the risk of placing myself, as researcher, too much at the centre of the study.

In locating the study within the interpretive paradigm, attention is drawn to the doubly interpreted nature of social research, whereby the reality being investigated is interpreted both by the research participants and the researcher, and am thus aware of the limitations of any claims to objectivity. Giddens has characterised this as the double hermeneutic: “[t]he implications of the double hermeneutic is that social scientists can't but be alert to the transformative effects that their concepts and theories might have upon what they set out to analyse” (Giddens 1996, p.77, cited in Delanty 2005, p.6).

Given that the research method involved one-on-one interviews, the issues of ethical sensitivity and power dynamics within the interviewing process was given due consideration (Tierney 2014; Germeten 2013; Goodson & Sikes 2001). Furthermore, the study's theoretical framework is built around the work of theorists for whom the ethics of recognition is paramount. Thus, the design of the study's research approach is rooted in an ethical commitment to the individual within the research process. The choice of an interview design based on BNIM arose in large part from these theoretical and ethical commitments. The open structure of the BNIM interview means that it is the participant rather than the researcher who chooses what material to include and what to omit from the interview, thus bringing some balance to the power dynamics in the interview process. The training course on BNIM interviewing attended by the interviewer placed the issue of ethics within the interview process at its centre and the advice and guidelines offered during this course shaped the research design.

Research limitations

As with any piece of research, there are certain limitations to the scope of the study and its findings. Firstly, the study's findings are neither generalisable nor representative. These limitations are pertaining to the methodology itself and were considered during the research design phase, with the conclusion that, despite these limitations, the methodology as described was nevertheless the most appropriate choice for the research study. Other limitations arose during the research, in particular during the fieldwork stage. While those limitations were regrettable and caused some delay to

the progress of the study, their effects were not enough to threaten the integrity of the study as a whole. This section will discuss each type of limitation in turn.

As mentioned in the discussion above on the choice of research paradigm, this study does not make any claims that its findings can be generalisable in the sense of offering broad truths about ranges or categories of people. This would be an impossible claim to make from a practical point of view, given that the study adopts a small-scale and purposive sampling approach. Furthermore, as has been made clear through the discussion of the theoretical framework, the study's ontological and epistemological foundations do not support any claims towards generalisable findings. The guiding philosophy of the study, with its emphasis on uncertainty, plurality and uniqueness, is a philosophy that rejects the idea that people can be neatly categorised or that one person's experience can be exactly replicated by multiple others. There are limitations to the ways in which life-course research can be generalised due to questions of subjectivity:

“using a questionnaire for the collection of this kind of data has its limitations. In general, asking people to retrieve information from their long-term memory always leads to selective information, influenced over time by new experiences, events, and other people.”

(Beijaard *et al.* 2000, p.762)

The study's methodology is informed by the fields of life history and narrative inquiry in expressly acknowledging and working with this perceived limitation through a focus on depth and nuance in the analysis of teacher identity work. The study was not designed to be generalisable and it is situated within a research tradition that has successfully argued that generalisability is not an essential trait of social research. This lack of generalisability, while it is a limitation of the study, is thus not a flaw in the research design but the result of a conscious decision. The study represents a particular type of qualitative research that sits alongside and complements research in the quantitative tradition. In identifying generalisability as one of its limitations, I am not pointing to a weakness but rather clarifying that I am not making any false assumptions about the type of findings that will arise from the study.

In a similar manner to the points raised about the generalisability of the study, representativeness is one of the unavoidable limitations of this type of study. If anything however, the theoretical framework calls even more strongly for rejection of ideas of representativeness. It would be entirely against the concept of the person as a unique

and irreplaceable existence to try to introduce the idea that the research participants could represent an entire group of people. The study does not claim thus that these particular teachers represent the lives and experiences of all teachers of their generation. Rather, it highlights the processes at work in those lives and points to some themes that emerge from those processes. Again, this limitation of the study is the result of decisions about the research approach taken with the clear understanding that the study's findings would not claim to be representative. Similarly, the study does not claim that its sample represents every type and every category of teacher. There are people amongst the participants drawn from a range of backgrounds and demographics, in order to have some diversity of experience amongst the narratives. However, to allocate the participants to groups based on such markers would be to highlight the 'what' rather than the 'who' and to engage in the flattening of difference that both Cavarero and Arendt clearly set themselves against.

An unanticipated limitation of the study arose during the fieldwork phase, involving difficulties in the recruitment of participants. For this reason, the fieldwork phase of the study proceeded more slowly than had been planned. All the avenues identified during the research design were used in the recruitment but the uptake was lower than expected. Interestingly, there were numerous cases whereby teachers suggested that they had strong opinions about education policy but, when invited to participate in an interview, expressed reluctance to discuss those opinions, even though they were assured their anonymity would be protected. This delay in the study's progress, whereby numerous contacts were established and then discontinued, was not adequately planned for at the outset and led to some obstacles in terms of time and resources. Similarly, the evolving nature of the study meant that the targeted research sample changed during the fieldwork phase. This meant that two interviews that had been carried out and transcribed no longer met the study's criteria as the participants did not have enough years of experience in the profession. However, while the recruitment and fieldwork phase cannot be said to have been unproblematic, the limitations described did not threaten the overall integrity of the research design and, as discussed above, the final sample is in accordance with previous work in the theoretical and methodological literatures.

6. Teachers' Stories: The Research Participants

Before the findings of the study are discussed in Part Two of the dissertation, this section will briefly introduce each of the eight research participants. This is in keeping with the study's theoretical commitment to the recognition of the singular 'who' as opposed to the categorised 'what' of the life-story.

Research participant demographics

Name	Gender	Age (years)	Experience (years)	School type ¹¹
Roy	M	60-69	35-39	Secondary / Girls
Mary	F	40-49	25-29	Secondary / Boys
John	M	60-69	35-39	Secondary / Boys
Evelyn	F	50-59	20-24	Varied (see description)
Fiona	F	50-59	30-34	Community / Co-ed
Janet	F	60-69	30-34	Secondary / Girls
Carmel	F	40-49	25-29	ETB / Co-ed
Sinéad	F	40-49	20-24	Community / Girls

Introducing the research participants

Mary

Mary is in her late forties and has been teaching for 25 years. After graduating from university she initially worked in the private sector. However, she left after two years and entered Initial Teacher Education, a career in teaching having always been, as she puts it, at the back of her mind. She started work in a city centre boys' voluntary school immediately after ITE, and has been teaching there since. She found it difficult to adjust to teaching boys, and says it took five years before she felt comfortable in her

¹¹ There are three categories of second-level school: a) Secondary Schools, usually owned by religious groups or organisations; b) Vocational schools, owned by the local authorities and run by the Education and Training Board or local authorities; c) Comprehensive/community schools which were established by the State and are owned by partnership boards of trustees. (Adapted from Coolahan 2003, p. 15)

position. Mary describes having come to what she terms a “crossroads” during the seventh year of her career. She was feeling “burnt out” and did a diploma in learning support, a decision she says “re-energised” her.

She says that becoming a mother has been the single biggest change in her teaching identity throughout her career. She describes how her teaching style

“changed...*dramatically*...when I had a child...I’m just more kind of *involved* or something. I’m starting to see them as just...human beings rather than...the enemy”.

She says that she is now less focused on simply getting work done and more on developing connections and relationships and that, as a result, she has enjoyed teaching a lot more since becoming a mother. Her relationships with her students’ parents have changed dramatically as well and she describes it as “all of a sudden it was like I was part of a club I’d never been in before, like a whole different connection”.

Mary describes the year immediately preceding the interview as “one of the toughest years of my life”. She says that, during this difficult time in her personal life, her professional life and her relationships to her students sustained her in a way that she would not have anticipated earlier in her career;

“it was the teaching that kept me going..unbelievable...I *never* thought I’d see the day...do you know, it’s amazing the way your career can just kind of dip and you know, you can be so burnt out one year and then...”.

Roy

Roy is in his mid-sixties and recently took early retirement. Other than one year immediately after graduation, he spent his entire career working in a single-sex girls’ school under religious patronage, in an inner-city location. He was a classroom teacher for his whole career. He grew up in a provincial town, not far from the city he subsequently worked in.

He enjoyed teaching practice during his ITE. However he says that he “learned the hard way” during his first year as a qualified teacher, where he struggled with classroom management. He says that he felt he was the only person having any trouble and that everyone was looking at him. He expresses relief that he wasn’t fired during that year. The themes of isolation, competition and anxiety are ones that Roy raises often as he recounts the narrative of his teaching career. He says that he “did go through

a very low time in teaching” and recounts negative interactions with school management and with students.

Roy goes on to say that he started to enjoy teaching again later in his career. The reason he gives for this is that he wasn't “afraid” anymore, that he felt he had got to the stage where “all they could do was fire me” and that he was at an age where that, “wasn't going to ruin my life”. He describes realising around this point in his career that he was not going to be able to have a perfect class, that things were never going to be perfect and says this realisation allowed him to feel better about teaching. To do so however, he “had to ignore a lot of things” and he feels that, in the current climate of accountability, he would not have this freedom. In retrospect, he is not sure that he would choose the same career again. Roy became emotional at points during the interview and he ended the conversation with the statement that, “it was good to get to talk to someone about these things.”

Janet

Janet took early retirement recently after teaching for over thirty years in a single-sex voluntary girls' school, which is located in a large regional town. Janet's professional narrative is interesting in that she spent her entire career, from NQT until retirement in one school, a fact about which she seems conflicted, describing it laughingly at first as “boring” but then stating, “I'd consider it a huge advantage”. She is one of the many teachers of her generation who have taken early retirement in recent years, many of them ostensibly as a reaction to the perceived injustice of changes to the pay and working conditions of teachers and other public servants following the 2008 economic crisis and the subsequent years of cutbacks in public sector budgets, although there are likely myriad other reasons behind these decisions that are less easy to capture.

The sense of professional identity that emerges from Janet's narrative is to a large degree positive, committed and motivated and she positions herself as being driven by an educational philosophy that is rooted in a sense of care for her students. As she describes it, “I suppose my theory about teaching is that teaching is about people”.

Janet frames her interview narrative in such a way that there is a distinct sense of a ‘now and then’, whereby the ‘then’ of the past is perceived or positioned by her as much more favourable to the ‘now’ of the present. This perception is illustrated through observations and anecdotes that invariably paint the present context as inferior in

various ways to the past. It is not possible of course to arrive at any objective estimation of whether or not this is actually the case. However, it is interesting in terms of narrative function that this comparison comes through so strongly over the course of Janet's interview, suggesting perhaps an attempt to justify her early retirement and to bring that decision into alignment with her professional self-concept as a motivated and committed educator.

Carmel

Carmel is one of the younger of the research participants and has been teaching for approximately 25 years. She has spent the majority of her career in a co-educational community school in a regional town, although she began teaching in a single-sex fee-paying urban school. During her interview she moves back and forth between anecdotes and descriptions of these two schools, highlighting the contrasts in the educational and socio-economic backgrounds of the students and the way in which she perceives these differences to shape their experiences of education and her own experience as a teacher.

Carmel positions herself as being a highly committed and motivated teacher, highlighting in her interview narrative her participation in numerous extra-curricular activities, continuing professional development opportunities and subject associations. She speaks warmly of her early years in teaching, when she felt very quickly that she had "found [her] niche" and describes the first school she was working in as a stimulating environment in which she was mentored by teachers whose intellectual commitment and professional principles she admired. However, while she does speak positively of her current school, she has become increasingly disillusioned about certain aspects of teaching. This disillusionment is connected to changes in the wider educational and societal contexts and to the disadvantaged socio-economic background of the school community. In order to negotiate the increasing challenges she perceives in her wider professional context, Carmel focuses on the act of teaching and the satisfaction that it still brings her:

"there's nothing like the buzz though of a good class, when you feel you've done something with them or you've taught them something [...] that's what I just think about now, I just think about going into my room, closing the door, hoping that I have a group that will listen to me and that I can try and do work with of some description. And that's still a lovely feeling. And that's never dimmed".

John

John always wanted to be a teacher, an ambition that he says was formed in his early experiences of education, at both primary and second-level, where he had teachers who greatly influenced him. He describes himself taking to teaching almost immediately during his ITE, saying he was “absolutely besotted. By it [teaching] and by them [his students]”. After his ITE he took a job in an inner-city, single-sex boys’ school under religious patronage, a school he describes as being dramatically different to the middle-class girls’ school in a regional town in which he had done his teaching practice. He describes the school as being a “tough station” and a “pretty rough place”. Of the staff members, he was the only one who refused to use corporal punishment, a fact he attributes to the kindness he had been always been shown his own teachers. As a result of this, and his unfamiliarity with the teaching subject he had been assigned to, he says he “barely made it through the probationary year”. He remembers one class group in particular as being kind and supportive and emphasises that he is still grateful to them and values the bond he forged with them. John is certain that if it were not for the decision to abolish corporal punishment, he would not have stayed in the profession. However, he says that, following its abolishment, “my life became the greatest joy I could ever have imagined”.

John taught in that school for close to 25 years, although he made sure during that time to keep “reinventing” himself, saying that he didn’t want to be someone who did the same thing year after year. To this end he participated in CPD, in extra-curricular activities and was actively involved in a number of policy and curriculum initiatives. After 25 years, John took a position as principal of another school, which was also an inner city, single-sex boys’ school, where he remained until his recent retirement. He positions himself as having been driven by the same strong sense of social justice and firmly held educational values during his tenure as principal as he was while a classroom teacher. His interview narrative is more political than many of the others, perhaps because his role as principal of a school with a designated socio-economically disadvantaged status involved so much contact and, at times, disagreements with school leaders and with other public bodies. He takes a strong position on what he perceives to be a fall in morale and confidence amongst members of the teaching profession, arguing that the worsening social and financial status of the profession must be addressed if a decline in the quality of education is to be avoided.

Evelyn

Evelyn says that she “kind of fell into teaching. I wasn’t, it wasn’t something that I always wanted to do like for some people”. However, despite this early uncertainty, she says she “really enjoyed the experience” of initial teacher education, something she attributes to the fact that her early experience of teaching was in a country where:

“they had pumped serious amounts of money into the education system and there were, they were trying out a lot of different styles of teaching [...] for me that was great fun. Coming from a system, I had done my education in Ireland. And then did my university in [country]. So I just thought this was fantastic. So I really embraced that”.

Evelyn spent three years teaching in second-level public schools in that country, before then moving to another country where she spent three years working in a privately owned school. When she returned home to Ireland and began teaching in public second-level schools, she says “was a little bit shocked I suppose, when I came back to Ireland to find that things really hadn’t moved on a lot”. She highlights the emphasis on examinations, the dominance of traditional teaching methods, and the lack of collegiality as the factors which she found most difficult to adapt to upon her return to Ireland and mentions missing what she describes as the “vibrancy” and “fun” of the schools she had worked in abroad.

Evelyn positions herself as having a strongly developed sense of educational values and as being highly committed to those values. She places the interpersonal relationships between students and teachers and between colleagues at the centre of her description of those values. Autonomy is also important to her as a teacher and she describes autonomy in terms of being able to adapt her teaching to the needs of her students. Evelyn no longer works in the mainstream, and is a teacher in a second-level school which provides education for students who have left or been excluded from mainstream schools for emotional, social, or behavioural reasons. She values working in this school because of the close working relationship she shares with her colleagues and because she finds the type of individualised teaching she can do there more rewarding than in the mainstream where classes are much bigger. She observes that “I never, I like the idea of *teaching* but not necessarily being labelled as a teacher. I wanted to always be me”. In the setting in which she now works she feels that she has the freedom to be herself in teaching, something that she says is important to her because:

“I think that leaves you open. Because you can but learn from your students and every day, I, with a student, you know, I learn something, absolutely. I learn something. And, you know, I’m fortunate enough to be in a place where that can happen, you know, *every day*”.

Fiona

Fiona has been teaching for over thirty years, the majority of that time in a co-educational community school in a socio-economically disadvantaged urban context. She was the only research participant to have taken a concurrent teacher education degree, meaning that where the other participants took a general undergraduate degree followed by a postgraduate teaching qualification, Fiona took a Bachelor of Education degree. She says she made this choice because she was certain she wanted to be a teacher and saw it as a quicker route into the profession: “from the outset I deliberately *chose* to train to be a teacher. I didn’t *fall* into it, the way some older colleagues have remarked they did”. Despite her certainty about her career choice, she describes the early years of her teaching career, through the 1990s and into the 2000s, as being “really quite difficult”.

Fiona presents her career narrative as two contrasting halves, the first of which consisted of 16 years characterised by what she herself terms as “stagnation and isolation” and the second half as a period of renewed motivation and enthusiasm which included a change of role within the school, extra-curricular involvement, and university based continuing teacher education. Fiona attributes the negative experiences of the first half of her career to an absence of collegiality and a lack of “meaningful contact with colleagues”, along with inadequate opportunities for continuing professional development. She describes herself as “simply clocking in and out” each school day during those years.

The second part of Fiona’s career represents a complete change from the first, in that she engages in numerous extra-curricular opportunities, takes on work in educational contexts outside her school, and participates in postgraduate education. She says this change arose from a period in which she “began to reflect on my professional life, and I was just over...em....my mid-thirties, around that time anyway, and realised that I needed to get out of the rut I felt I was in”. Her professional confidence and enthusiasm increased from this period onwards, which she attributes to being engaged

in summer work in the private sector in which she had a sense of being valued. She took on the position of Home School Community Liaison¹² [HSCL] officer a few years after this because she “wanted change” and “felt the position offered something new and different”. She spent nearly seven years in that role and describes it as the “highlight of my professional career” and one she feels “privileged” and “grateful” to have occupied.

Fiona had returned to mainstream classroom teaching from the HSCL role the year before taking part in the interview and says that “I was like a new teacher again, starting from scratch in a way”. She found the year difficult and observes that she perceived little improvement in terms of collegiality or support for teachers in the years she had been away from the classroom. She is critical of the intensification of the teaching workload and of what she terms as a lack of care for the wellbeing of teachers. At the time of the interview, Fiona was on a year’s career break and had not yet decided whether she would return to classroom teaching.

Sinéad

Sinéad, along with Carmel and Mary, is one of the three younger participants in the study. As she puts it, she “came a little bit later than most to teaching”. She says that entering teaching when she was slightly older than average made a “huge difference” because “I’d had that *delay* in coming to a career choice, so I definitely wanted to get in and really learn fast, really get my feet under me very quickly.” She describes intentionally seeking out experienced colleagues from whom she could learn and as a result she “developed relationships within that school very very quickly.” She spent 23 years of her career teaching in that school, before moving recently to take up a post as deputy principal in another school. The school in which she spent most of her career has traditionally had a strong academic profile. It is located in a satellite town of a large city and its student intake has in recent years become more ethnically and socio-economically diverse.

Sinéad describes herself as being “very conscientious” in her work, part of which she attributes to her “natural make-up” and part of which she thinks is the result

¹² Home School Community Liaison is a programme which operates within schools that have been designated as socio-economically disadvantaged. It funds teachers within those schools to work as HSCL officers who engage with the families and communities within the school catchment area and run support and intervention programmes for students who are at risk of leaving education early.

of being part of “a hugely dedicated staff”. Throughout her career she has taken opportunities to engage in continuing professional development and in postgraduate education and has been involved in numerous initiatives and pilot programmes at school-level and regionally. She observes that this continual engagement with the educational context beyond her immediate context helped her to negotiate the challenges of staying in one school for so long: “when questions began to come or maybe I felt I was in the doldrums, I got out and I looked for CPD opportunities”.

The professional and the personal are closely interwoven in Sinéad’s interview narrative and, indeed, she explicitly describes her teaching identity in those terms:

“once you become invested personally, the professional and personal kind of merge [...] and it becomes then a huge, it actually becomes integral to *your* identity. Which I think is...you know, you don’t sort of say, I work as a teacher, you actually begin to say, I *am* a teacher.”

Her attention to this aspect of her teacher identity meant that she brought a number of anecdotes into her interview narrative relating to her family background and to her children, illustrating various beliefs and values she held or describing moments of her career at which she experienced vulnerability, for example on her return to work after she became a mother for the first time.

At the time of the interview Sinéad had moved through a number of posts of responsibility in her school and had become a mentor for younger members of staff and was looking forward to taking up her new position. In reflecting on her career to date, Sinéad captured her beliefs about education in the following description of a school trip:

“sitting on that train with these madcap sixteen year olds but *so*...you know, they wanted to sit and talk to you, wanted to call you [first name], wanted to tell you their story, wanted to ask you yours...and I was just sitting there going, *this* is just amazing. If we could just get that through to people’s heads as well. I think we have become so quagmired in what academia actually *means*, what it is. That we need to kind of step back. It’s all about growth and development and learning. To me that’s what academia is”.

Findings and Discussion

Introduction to the Findings Chapters

In ‘Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood’ (2000), Cavarero tells the story of a Milanese woman, Emilia, whose life story is written down for her by another woman, Amalia, an experience which Emilia finds profoundly moving. Through the example of Emilia, Cavarero highlights the political significance of having one’s uniqueness recognised. Due to “the lack of a shared scene of co-appearance, the lack of a true political space” (2000, p. 58), Emilia’s uniqueness risked not being recognised or remaining only partially exposed until Amalia captured Emilia’s ‘narratable self’ in writing. The significance of Emilia, a seemingly ‘ordinary’ woman, having a life story that is unique to her represents the distinction between the ‘what’ story and the ‘who’ story:

“*What* Emilia is we could, in fact, try to define with a good approximation: she is a Milanese housewife, she is poor [...] In this, she is the champion of a certain sociological ‘type’. *Who* Emilia is, on the other hand, eludes this classification. This *who* is precisely an unrepeatable uniqueness.”

(Cavarero 2000, p. 58, emphasis in original)

Cavarero’s interpretation of Emilia’s story became a guiding concept during the analysis of the interview narratives for this study. As each individual teacher’s narrative unfolded, Cavarero’s arguments about the idea of the ‘what’ overshadowing the ‘who’ echoed more strongly. In narrative after narrative, it seemed that the individual’s unique teacher-self risked remaining partially unexposed due to the absence of a shared political space within the profession. There is a taken-for-grantedness in the ‘what’ of teacher identity and teachers’ lives. As the interview narratives showed, it was the dominance of this ‘what’ story to the detriment of the ‘who’ that made it most difficult for the individual teachers to sustain a positive and coherent narrative of teacher identity, turning instead to disillusionment and doubt. While each narrative is necessarily singular, the one common thread that runs through them all is the significance of moments of recognition, of “being heard” as one teacher puts it. The teachers’ reactions to and interpretations of the challenges of their profession hinged on

the one crucial detail of whether they felt recognised as a ‘who’ within their professional environment or reduced to a ‘what’. The political dimension of this is present in the idea of “the political as a shared space of action” (Cavarero, 2000: 57), whereby it is the micro-political space of the school through which the act of recognition operates. This political space, with its porousness to the macro-political space of education policy, becomes the space of action in which teachers live out their identity narratives.

Building on the findings from the teacher identity narratives and locating those findings within the empirical and theoretical literature discussed in the previous chapters, the next chapters will propose a model of ethical professionalism. This model of professionalism draws on the concepts that emerged from the analysis of the findings as core aspects of the teacher identities of the research participants. The principal concept within this model is the ethics of recognition, as understood through the theoretical work of Cavarero and Butler on interdependency and our vulnerability to the Other. Interlinked with the ethics of recognition are the concepts of relationality, accountability, autonomy, power and responsibility. A model of ethical professionalism does not replace existing models of teacher professionalism but rather adds to them by bringing the idea of our essential interdependency and vulnerability to the core of professionalism and using this as a starting point from which to build sustainable educational relationships.

In order to develop the idea of ethical professionalism, the next three chapters will discuss the key themes that emerged from the interview narratives. These themes are grouped according to their intersections in the narratives. They are: a) status and power; b) recognition and relationality; and c) accountability and autonomy. The concepts of agency and vulnerability run throughout each pairing of themes. The manner in which these themes operate varies from teacher to teacher and the singularity of the teacher identity narratives allows for a nuanced examination of the implications and effects of the manner of their operation. These three pairs of themes, while each functioning as standalone chapters, all feed into and are linked by an overarching theme which emerged strongly across all of the interview narratives. This umbrella theme is the macro/micro interplay of professionalisation and affect, specifically vulnerability. The findings of this study illustrate some of the ways in which discourses of professionalisation operate in the context of Irish post-primary education and highlight some particularities in the contextual interpretation of the discourses when set within

the international literature, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. While some of these findings are very much contextually situated in terms of Irish education policy, the strongest emergent theme, that of the link between professionalisation and vulnerability, is one that is relevant across the spectrum of educational contexts in which processes of professionalisation have been identified. By grounding the emergent theories within the interplay of the individual narratives of identity and the operation of professional and policy discourses, the findings suggest ways in which the nuances of individual affect play a role in the interpretation of and engagement with discourses of professionalisation.

This in turn feeds into education policy because, if one understands policymaking as a reiterative cycle in which interpretation and enactment are crucial steps (Lingard 2013a; Braun *et al.* 2011), it is essential to develop a better understanding of the effects of the affective domain within processes of policy enactment. It can be argued that much education policymaking neglects this affective domain and the conditions of enactment of policy, and that this neglect has long-term impacts on the professional identity of teachers and on the ways in which the profession as a whole engages with education policy, as seen in the examples of veteran teachers in the literature on teacher identity and education change (Santoro 2017; 2011; Hargreaves 2005; Lasky 2005; Van Veen *et al.* 2005).

The participants in this research used various resources to negotiate the enmeshment of their professional identities, their personal identities and the discourses shaping their professional contexts. Some of them were more successful than others in this and were able to draw on tools that allowed them to balance the juxtaposition of affect, vulnerability and professionalisation on their own terms and enabled them to develop a sense of their own coherent narrative of professional identity within the broader narrative. Others were less successful in this process and it is this contrast that is of particular interest in the discussion of the findings.

Drawing on the experiences and perceptions of the teachers who participated in the research, the argument will be developed that there is a lack of room in current educational discourses for singularity and uniqueness. However, there is a paradox within these discourses because, although there is little room for singularity, the individual as competitor is emphasised. In other words, there is a focus on individualism rather than individuality. Cavarero draws attention to this distinction between the unique

but interdependent individuals in her theory of identity and the atomistic individuals in neoliberal discourses of competition (Cavarero & Bertolino 2008). Bringing this idea to the discussion of the research findings, I argue that, without a strong and coherent individual narrative of the self through which to negotiate the affective challenges of professionalisation, education practitioners risk becoming entrenched in a professional identity that is reactive and risk-averse. Furthermore, the current emphasis on competitive individualism creates long-lasting negative implications for the development and sustainability of a progressive teacher professionalism rooted in an ethics of care and relationality.

According to Adriana Cavarero, each individual's narrative of the self contains a number of what she calls 'exemplary moments', which come to serve as anchors or focus points in one's identity narrative. Taking this idea as one of the lenses through which to view the analysis of the research interviews in this study allows us to explore how, in a similar fashion to the construction of a personal identity narrative, professional identities are constructed around moments which, in various ways, distil or bring into focus the many complex factors that interact in the course of one's professional life. These moments can serve to confirm or reaffirm an individual's understanding of their professional identity. Equally, however, they can function as the catalyst for a questioning or a reinterpretation of the professional self.

This idea of exemplary moments emerged as a useful tool with which to examine the structure of the interviews themselves. Whether consciously or not, the research participants each used exemplary moments as a narrative device within their interview, using them to anchor and structure their storying of the self. Sometimes these moments were descriptions of experiences or events that fed into the participants' narrative of identity at the level of the self, as in Cavarero's definition above. In other cases however, the moments were used to confirm or represent various arguments the participants were making about teacher professional identity on the macro-level. It becomes particularly interesting to look at the interplay of these two types of exemplary moments, those that serve as a focus point in the individual's professional biographic narrative and those that serve as an anchor for the individual's arguments about the profession's identity. This interplay serves to highlight the impossibility of separating the micro from the macro and illustrates the way in which one's individual identity is

understood and interpreted through and with the meso level of the group identity and the macro level of the societal context.

The presentation of the study's findings takes the form of three chapters, each addressing and theorising a group of themes which emerged from the analysis as working alongside or in interaction with each other. Each of these chapters include a discussion of how these themes and theories feed into the study's overarching argument around an ethical professionalism, which will be discussed and theorised in detail in the concluding chapter.

The first chapter in the findings section centres on the themes of status and power. It presents examples of moments in which the participants felt their status to be under threat, either at micro level or at macro level, and looks at the affective challenges these moments pose in regard to maintaining a coherent narrative of the professional self. These experiences are contextualised and analysed through the lens of some of the educational and societal changes occurring over the period of the research participants' careers. The research participants' experiences of negotiating and managing perceived changes in status is discussed and some examples from the interviews are outlined where this was done successfully. Drawing on Cavarero's thoughts on recognition and voice, the chapter unpacks the interplay of status, vulnerability and power. It examines the role of this interplay in the construction of an ethical professionalism which allows room for vulnerability and is thus better equipped to negotiate shifts of status and power. This discussion leads into the following chapter, which focuses on a key aspect of ethical professionalism, namely relationality.

The concept of relationality and its interplay with vulnerability emerged as a key theme from the interview narratives. Chapter 6 looks at this theme in terms of the concepts with which it was linked in the participants' narratives: collegiality, autonomy, individualism, isolation and ethics. Both positive and negative examples of this theme are highlighted and the effects of these examples on individual identities are discussed. Competitive individualism features strongly in the discussion of themes in this chapter. Basing the argument on the extent of professional isolation and lack of collegiality that has been highlighted across the literature on Irish education and that has been experienced by a number of this study's participants, this chapter suggests that the space already exists in the Irish context for the competitive individualism associated with current discourses of neoliberalism to take firm hold (e.g. Lynch 1987). The conclusion

to the chapter suggests some strategies through which teachers can negotiate this challenge and argues for a centring of interdependency in the educational relation.

The third findings chapter centres on the interplay of accountability and autonomy and will explore the ethical implications of this interplay in terms of the dynamics of power and vulnerability that operate within mechanisms of accountability. The idea of autonomy is brought into this theory, both in terms of the negative affective impact of a lack of autonomy but also through the presentation of some positive examples whereby participants experience a sense of autonomy which is rooted in responsibility to the Other. This type of autonomy in turn feeds back into a relational accountability. The chapter goes on to point out some crosscutting dynamics between personal and professional identities, ethics of care, accountability and responsibility, and power and control. This feeds into the final section of the dissertation, which draws together the theories arising from the findings in a discussion of the overarching argument around professionalism, vulnerability and relationality, before concluding with some final remarks on the research methodology, along with recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 5

Status and Power

1. Introduction

In the analysis of the interview narratives, status and power emerged as one of the key pairing of themes. The themes of status and power operated in varying and often contradictory ways depending on whether the context of the theme's appearance was at the micro-level of the individual, the meso-level of the school and community, or the macro-level of policy and broader society. The concepts of voice, recognition, agency, control, vulnerability and affect fed into these themes in ways that point to the ambiguous roles played by status and power in the development both of a positive individual self-concept and of an accountable and ethical professionalism. This chapter presents and discusses the findings around these themes, exploring the ways in which the research participants perceive their operation at present at the level of schools and policy and interrogating the negative effects for both teachers and students of the dominance of particular interpretations of the concepts of status and power.

The chapter is divided into two parts, one focusing on status and the other on power, although, as intersecting themes they each feature throughout the chapter. The chapter begins by situating the research participants' narratives within the changes they perceive to the status of the teaching profession in the Irish context, and linking these perceptions to the discussion in Chapter Two of the contextual changes during the time period spanned by the participants' careers. The following sections discuss in turn the participants' perceptions of status at the meso-level of the school and at the macro-level of society and policy. The discussion in these sections explores the nuanced interaction of the concepts of voice, agency, and vulnerability with status. Building on this discussion, the participants' interpretations of status are unpacked in the following sections in order to develop an understanding of the complexity of its operation. Two broad interpretations of status are identified through an analysis of the types of markers and reference points used by the participants. The first part of the chapter closes with a

discussion of Sinéad's perceptions in relation to status, which act as a counter-example to the dominant interpretations of change in the status of the teaching profession in the Irish context.

The second part of the chapter examines the operation of the theme of power within the teacher identity narratives of the participants. It begins by developing the discussion of status into an analysis of its intersections with the theme of power and looks at how the concept of agency informs this intersection. The next section explores the concept of powerlessness, which emerged strongly from a number of the interviews, particularly in relation to feelings of vulnerability and a loss of status. The dominant interpretations of power, powerlessness, and status change that emerge from the interviews are framed in terms of a power shift. The historic interpretation of power in the Irish educational context and its close links to the concept of control are unpacked in the closing section in order to add further nuance to the understanding of the theme.

The conclusion to the chapter places the discussion of status and power within an argument for a reconceptualisation of the roles of agency, voice, and vulnerability within teacher professionalism. This reconceptualisation is based on the ethical implications of the operation and distribution of power and its interaction with interpretations of status within the context of education. The concepts of agency, voice, and vulnerability are positioned within a broader frame of ethical professionalism which places relationality and recognition at its centre in order to challenge some of the dominant interpretations of status and power. The next chapter, Chapter Six, further develops this idea by focusing on the operation of the themes of relationality and recognition in the interview narratives.

2. Status: Interpretations and Perceptions

Status change and the teaching profession: situating the narratives

The perception of a change in the teaching profession's status is a theme that emerged very strongly from all but two of the interview narratives. This finding was not unexpected, given that the review of the literature on the Irish context indicated that the status of the profession in Ireland has changed over recent decades. Taking Roy, John, and Fiona as examples, their own education took place in the 1970s, a time when

completion of post-primary education was relatively low in Ireland¹³. Thus, the fact alone that they progressed to third-level education meant that their educational attainment was at a higher level than the majority of their age cohort. Their choices to enter initial teacher education would have been made in the context of a society in which the teaching profession would have been perceived as a “safe occupation” (Keane & Heinz 2015) through which students from a working or agricultural class background could advance their social position and in which it was possible for students from a lower middle class background to maintain their social position. Teaching was seen as a good career pathway for academically able students without the financial or social capital to enter, for example, the medical or legal professions. As Roy puts it,

“there wasn’t much on. When I was going to secondary school, it was fairly restricted [...] well let’s put it this way...if you’re a bright girl you’d be going for teaching and if you’re thick you’d be going for a nurse.”

The research participants’ socio-economic backgrounds, while not a major topic of discussion in any of the interview narratives, did arise in places and their backgrounds appeared to be in alignment with the literature on the profession in Ireland. For example, both Fiona and Carmel make explicit reference to the fact their own parents did not complete second-level education, while John, Roy and Janet make reference to their family backgrounds in the lower-middle or working class sectors. Thus, in the context in which these research participants entered initial teacher education, in the early to mid 1980s, becoming a teacher would likely have been perceived as a positive move and as a way to cement or enhance their socio-economic position.

Moving through the subsequent decades, we see a sharp rise in levels of educational attainment and third-level participation in Ireland. Whereas in the late 1970s, it would have been relatively uncommon for a student such as Roy from a small regional town to attend university, by the late 2010s it is the norm¹⁴, with educational and social stratification predicated on factors such as type of university education rather than progression (McCoy & Smyth 2011). In terms of educational attainment, teachers are arguably no longer given the same social status as they had been throughout the

¹³ The school completion rate in 1980, for example, was 60% (Byrne & McCoy 2017). By 2010, this had risen to 94%, the second-highest in Europe for that year (DES 2017).

¹⁴ In 1980 the higher education progression rate was 20%, this had risen to 55% by 2004 (Byrne & McCoy 2017). The OECD 2018 Country Note for Ireland indicates that the Irish higher education progression rate is now higher than the OECD average, with 69% of 20 year olds in education (OECD 2018).

twentieth century, given that the overall and relative number of people with similar and higher levels of educational attainment has grown (CSO 2016; Hogan 2003). Similarly, the relative position of the profession in terms of financial status is no longer as high as it had been, given that, again, both overall and relative levels of income have grown in the years since the Investment in Education Report in 1967. These changes in the socio-economic and cultural context of the country have had implications for the teaching profession that have included a drop in the profession's perceived cultural and social status, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Interestingly, the theme of status in this understanding of it at a macro-societal level did not emerge from either Sinéad or Evelyn's interview narrative, although status at the meso-level of the school did feature in their narratives. While it is impossible to infer any causality, it is perhaps worth noting that the socio-economic background of these two research participants was more middle-class. Teaching was not necessarily a means for them to advance their social position and, arguably, was not tied up with questions of status in the same way as it was for the other participants. This explains why the perceived change in the profession's status did not play as central a role in their identity narratives. The differing implications for one's identity depending on how central a role status plays in the narrative will be further discussed later in the chapter. Firstly however, some findings will be discussed that offer some insights into the nuanced manner in which status and voice operate at the meso and micro levels of the school and the individual, and this discussion will contribute to the subsequent interrogation of the themes at the broader levels of society and policy.

Status at the meso-level: school management and teacher voice

The operation of the theme of status in the interview narratives suggest that, even where the teaching profession's status at a macro-level is ambiguous or in a state of flux, the impact of that ambiguity can be mediated by a positive lived experience at the level of the school and the individual. The research participants' perception of their professional status was strongly influenced by the manner in which the concepts of voice and recognition featured in their teaching narratives. This is an important point in terms of developing and sustaining a positive professional identity throughout a teacher's career, as it is arguably much more feasible to manage the way in which status operates at school-level than it is at the macro-level. There were both positive and

negative examples of the operation of voice and status and, while these examples are of course unique to each individual and cannot be generalised, considering them alongside each other is nevertheless illuminating in terms of understanding the role of these concepts within teachers' professional identity narratives.

Mary, Evelyn, Camel and Janet all describe moments in their careers when they felt that they had a voice in decisions pertaining to their own working conditions or to the daily life of the school, each of them making the point explicitly or implicitly that this was important to them in terms of their motivation and commitment. Mary, for example, outlines how she was able to request a change to the subjects she was teaching, an option that was important to her because of the negative feelings she associated with one of her core subjects:

“I stopped teaching Business Studies as well and that was great, I hated it...it was great to get the option like.”

She explains that the opportunity to express timetabling preferences is part of the policy at the management and planning level in her school, which may be based on the recommendations around teacher voice made in policy documents such as *Looking At Our Schools* (2016). Describing the current deputy-principal's approach to his planning role, Mary recognises its importance in affective terms:

“Every year, the current guy that does all the planning...he sends an email out and he asks, what do you want? Which is such a lovely sense of being heard...and you know, you can actually...now, you mightn't get what you want but you can ask, you're *heard* you know?”

The point Mary makes here, that it is not necessarily getting “what you want” that she values but rather the sense that, “you're *heard*” is an important one. Building on this, one could argue that, even where a decision at school-level is not one favoured by a teacher, the long-term effects of that decision can be tempered by the teacher feeling that they have been included and listened to in the process leading to the decision. As Mary describes it,

“Well, most things would be voted on...yeah...and debated...like, in fairness, that would be one of the strengths of the school.”

Viewing this from the perspective of the theoretical framework, the opportunity to be heard within the school planning process is an example of the act of recognition, which is crucial for our understanding of our singularity and our perception of agency. Because management elicits the voice of the staff in the school-planning process, Mary and her

colleagues are positioned as actors within the process rather than the subjects of decisions made at management level. This sense of being heard and the agency it offers contribute to a positive perception of status within the school environment. In terms of the theoretical framework, the act of being recognised as a valid voice within the school means that the political space of the school is opened up to the individual as a potential space of action.

Crucially, it is the availability and potential of this space of action that is key in Mary's narrative, rather than the actual use of it. She praises the positive effects of the democratic style of management even though she personally characterises herself as not being particularly active in the decision-making process: "everyone's very vocal...I'm not now but the majority are". This distinction she makes suggests perhaps that, even if people do not appear to take an active individual role in discussions, the option and opportunity to do so is nevertheless of great value to them. Building on Mary's experience, knowing that one has the option of being heard is important in itself.

The challenge perhaps for school management is to develop this sense of voice beyond, as Mary puts it, debating and voting on decisions. This could then build towards an active engagement in school planning that positions teachers as curriculum and policy co-constructors. As discussed in Chapter 2, this idea of teacher as curriculum constructor has been somewhat absent from the Irish education context and, for example, the TALIS studies have found that teachers in post-primary education in Ireland have tended towards the implementation of curriculum that has been developed at the macro-level of national policy rather than the development of school-level curriculum programmes (OECD 2009). However, while the literature tends towards the view that this is the dominant tendency, examples have in fact existed whereby curriculum projects have been developed and enacted at a very local level by teachers working collaboratively. Two such examples highlighted in the literature are the Shannon Humanities Project and the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee's curriculum development arm. These projects were scaled down in the early 1980s following the establishment of the Curriculum and Education Board, which is now called the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA]. This was a move that, in hindsight, may have been detrimental to the development of a mature collegial profession because it transferred the notion of partnership from the meso-level of regional and local organisations to the macro-level of the nationwide NCCA. This is

perhaps an example of the contradiction alluded to above within the Irish education policy process whereby there is an explicit emphasis on partnership and teacher representation at official level but this emphasis doesn't filter down to a sense of partnership at teacher-level (Gleeson 2010). As the literature points out, programmes and projects that involve the development of alternative curricula and position teachers as central to that process have tended to be a feature of non-mainstream education and have not had a discernible effect on the mainstream.

Evelyn's experience is an example of what a teacher and student co-constructed educational environment might look like. After working in various mainstream settings, Evelyn has spent the past number of years working in a school which provides an alternative and more informal model of education for students who have left or been excluded from mainstream schools. She has gained great satisfaction from working in a non-mainstream setting where, as she describes,

“the teachers are more involved with their students, you know, and I think that's a good thing. And also, that you're not all teaching them exactly the same thing. That they're giving their input. And seeing their strengths. And let them shine, in ways that you wouldn't have been able to when you're just kind of saying, here, do an exam.”

At various points during her interview narrative, Evelyn highlights the high level of support and collegiality she feels to be a feature of her professional environment, as well as the strong rapport that she perceives as existing between the staff and the students in the school, which she attributes to the more informal atmosphere and the fact that the teachers can tailor their teaching to the students' needs. Evelyn comes across as having a positive perception of her professional identity, which she positions as being rooted in a strong sense of commitment and motivation. Based on her critique of her experience in the mainstream system, it seems that much of this sustained positive identity is based on her location within a non-mainstream education setting. In this setting she has the space and the autonomy to experience a sense of voice and ownership in her professional life, in an environment where relationality amongst colleagues and between teachers and students is emphasised.

There are of course constraints in terms of resources, time and staffing that limit the capacity of the mainstream setting to recreate this type of professional environment across all schools. However, given the positive and constructive effects that having such a strong sense of voice in her professional life has for Evelyn, it would perhaps be

beneficial to explore ways in which teacher involvement in curriculum and school planning could be scaffolded. This could begin with the model described by Mary whereby the staff members are included in discussion of decision-making and could build towards teachers having a fully agentic role in the construction of curriculum and the development of school planning.

Status at the macro-level: change and ambiguity

At a macro-level, the status of the teaching profession as a whole has long been one marked by ambiguity and uncertainty, characterised as ‘ontological insecurity’ (Thompson & Cook, 2014). As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the international literature highlights some current debates around the professional status of teachers and what it means to be a teacher in the context of professionalisation and learnification. These debates can be seen as an evolution of long-standing questions about whether teaching can claim to be a profession or whether it is rather a semi-or quasi-profession. The teaching profession in Ireland has arguably been fortunate in comparison to some other jurisdictions in that the profession in this country has traditionally been held in high social and cultural regard, as outlined in Chapter 2. However, as Irish culture, society, and economy have become more internationalist, the context of Irish education has become much more porous in terms of the reach and influence of international discourse around teaching and teachers. For example, the PISA and TALIS studies have been key factors in the opening up of discussions around the perceived fall in educational standards and the teaching profession’s role in this (Conway & Murphy 2013). In political terms, in the years immediately preceding these interviews there was a poor relationship between the sitting Minister for Education and the teaching unions, with a number of policy changes meeting with strong resistance and industrial disputes, as discussed in Chapter 3.

These contextual factors must be held in mind when considering the findings that emerged from the interviews around the theme of status at a macro-level and the manner in which these findings intersect with the theme of power. While the interview narratives covered the period from the late 1970s onwards, they cannot be temporally situated anywhere but in their present moment, meaning that, regardless of when the actual experience being discussed took place, it is inevitably perceived through a lens shaped by the narrator’s present subjectivity. Thus, the fact that the interviews took

place during a period of time when the teaching profession was experiencing a certain level of uncertainty and discontent cannot be ignored in the analysis of the research participants' narratives. These questions of status change at the macro-level operate in various ways in the identity narratives of teachers at the micro-level. Building on this, it appears that positive perception of status at the micro and meso-levels can counterbalance the potentially negative effects of ambiguity and change at the macro-level. Arguably, the key to this question lies in the manner in which status is interpreted and lived by the individual teachers. Building on the interview narratives, there appears to be, broadly, two approaches to a perceived change in the profession's status, each broad approach consisting of course of nuanced individual interpretations. In one approach, while the change in status may not necessarily be welcomed, there is an acknowledgment of the inevitability and even necessity of educational change in general and, within this, an attempt to engage with change and enact it on an agentic level, in this way protecting one's sense of status on an individual level. In the other approach there is again a sense of inevitability about educational change more generally and about change in status more specifically but, rather than engaging with the change and re-interpreting it on one's own terms, there is a rejection of it and a constant comparison to the past.

This second approach is no less agentic than the first as agency lies in resistance and rejection as much as it does in re-interpretation and enactment. However, the agency emerging from this type of approach is perhaps a different type of agency, one in which the energy is directed at maintaining the *status quo*. There is a curious paradox within this approach in that there appears to be a resignation around the inevitability of change and the lack of individual agency within the change. Yet, in their determined rejection of change, the individuals who take this position are in fact very much exercising individual agency. However, the former approach is ultimately likely to be more beneficial for the sustainability of a positive professional identity. Engaging with change and carving out a space for one's agency *within* that change means that one's personal sense of status can adapt and accommodate reconfigurations of one's role. On the other hand, a professional identity that is rooted in the past and is less open to change may lead to inflexible interpretations of status and ultimately a more negative self-concept.

Markers of status: internal or external?

There are three concepts in particular that emerged from the analysis of the interview narratives as feeding into the theme of status in such a way as to suggest that they are key constitutive elements of one's interpretation of status. These are voice, affect, and recognition. These concepts operate within the interview narratives in varying ways to contribute to the individual participants' sense of status at the meso-level of the school and at the micro-level of the self, as outlined above in the examples of Mary and of Evelyn. Moving to the consideration of status at the macro-level of the teaching profession within society and culture, the manner in which the research participants approach and interpret their status at this level is very much interlinked with the manner in which they experience their status at the other levels. Where an individual's narrative is one involving a positive perception of status at the level of the individual and the school, there appears to be a greater likelihood that they will engage with a change in status at the macro-level in the manner of the first approach discussed above. However, where there is an uncertainty or vulnerability in the individual's sense of status at the level of the self or of the school, it is more likely that changes in status at the broader level will be interpreted from the second approach. This is the case in particular in those interviews where the intersections of the theme of status with the concepts of voice and affect were of a more negative nature. For example, in Janet's case, she perceived a loss of voice within her school after a change in management and this led to negative affective implications and a subsequent defensive reaction to policy changes.

Building on this idea of two types of approaches to status change at the macro-level, it emerged that there were also two broad types of markers of status. As already discussed, there were among the research participants those for whom concepts like voice, affect, and agency were important measures by which they interpreted their personal status. However, there were other concepts which emerged as markers of status and, of those, the two that were most prevalent were societal status and financial markers. These two types of markers can be grouped under a rubric of internal and external. The internal markers, for example voice and affect, are based on an idea of status as emerging from an intrinsic self-worth. If the context and affective conditions allow it, the individual develops a sense of status based on a perception of being able to operate with agency within their world. Building on Cavarero and on Butler,

relationships are important in this idea because, as they argue in various ways, we are each vulnerable to the Other in terms of the recognition that is crucial to our personal sense of agency and voice.

The second type of marker, which we can term the external, is less based on intrinsic concepts of the self and more on extrinsic measures. It is a status that is always relative and is dependent on the individual's location within or against other individuals or groups. As such, it does not emerge from within the self but is read from external narratives. Relationships to the other are important in this idea also but in this understanding, it is not relationships of recognition that matter but rather relationships of measurement and reaction. The nature of the status that is built around this type of marker then is one that is relative and reactionary, imposed from outside rather than constructed from inside. Arguably, an over-dependency on this second type of status, the externally influenced type, would leave an individual less able to draw on internal resources to counteract the potentially negative effects of a change in status at macro-level.

The following section will discuss some of the ways in which external markers of status operated within the interview narratives and will consider the implications and effects of the prevalence of this understanding of status. These rubrics are not intended to describe any one person and, for many of the research participants, both types of markers of status were present in their narratives, often in complex and contradictory ways. Furthermore, there was an interesting chronological shift to be noticed within the interview narratives whereby some research participants whose narratives of their early careers seemed more rooted in internal markers of status appeared to become more concerned with external markers over the course of their careers.

Teaching and social status

The perceived fall in the social and cultural status of the teaching profession over recent decades was a theme that emerged as a concern for some of the research participants, particularly those who, in demographic terms, were of an older generation and had begun their careers in the late 1970s or early 1980s. The manner in which these teachers discuss the profession's change in social status is interesting in that they do not say explicitly that it concerns them in terms of their own professional identities. Indeed they often emphasise various other ways in which they consider teaching to be a

profession of inherent worth. John, for example, describes how he reacts when challenged by people about the length of the school holidays by justifying the profession's worth and social value. He goes on to say,

“[n]ow you're getting the sense of maybe, how important I thought of it. I think that to be a teacher...is one of the greatest things you can do. You are making and forming new people. That's how I see it.”

As an aside, this particular framing of teaching as formation is one that can be linked to the Catholic model of education and is an educational philosophy that, interestingly, could be discerned in the interview narratives of those teachers who had spent their careers in voluntary schools (John, Mary, Roy, Janet) but not as much in the narratives of teachers from the other school sectors (Fiona, Carmel, Evelyn, Sinéad). This shows perhaps that the different models of school do give rise to slightly different educational philosophies, an area that has potential for further research.

Returning to the question of social status, throughout his narrative, John refers in various ways to his belief in the intrinsic importance and worth of teaching, emphasising what he sees as its essential role in society and its inherent status arising from this. However, towards the end of the interview, he introduces some thoughts around the current status of teaching as he sees it:

“I think it comes back to...the view that society has...Irish society in particular now...in...the relative lack of regard for what it a) takes to be a teacher and b) what it means to be a teacher. And your place in your society.”

He is firm in his belief that if a graduate wants to enter the teaching profession in the Irish context at present, the perception of them is that “you must in some way be a loser. You must have...ah...a poor self-image”. John argues that, arising from this, “I think that is what is the single biggest issue facing the, the body of identity for teachers. It's a fundamental lacking in their own confidence”. This evaluation suggests that there are limitations to social status being positioned as one of the markers of the teaching profession's status. It links confidence with external measures of social esteem and regard, placing the importance on structure rather than on agency. Of course, it is inescapable that social status will play a role in the perception of professional status. However, emphasising other sources of self-esteem and confidence which incorporate teacher agency would make it more likely that the profession could challenge and resist structural changes to its social status.

John's perceptions and observations around the changing status of teachers in the Irish context is interesting in that it points to the way in which one's identity can hold within it what appear to be contradictory positions. He emphasises the strength of his educational philosophy and his belief in the inherent worth of teaching, which informed his decision to enter the profession. However, at the same time, the social status of teaching in relative terms appears to outweigh these beliefs when advising his son about his career:

“I always felt my son would go teaching, and he asked me during his degree. I said, son, I'm afraid I can't, I couldn't recommend it. And I think he would have been an extraordinary teacher.”

In much the way that Cavarero suggests narrative works to bring coherence to one's self-understanding, John's narrative of identity works to reconcile or align the contradictions within it. This is not to say that he is being in any way disingenuous when he states that he entered teaching because of his conviction of its inherent worth, however it is arguably also the case that the profession's higher social status at the time, while not necessarily an explicit reason for his entering the profession, played a role in the narrative around his choice.

Another research participant for whom the social status of the profession poses a concern is Roy, who is of a similar generation to John. He returns at various points during his narrative to the idea of the profession's social status and, in particular, to the idea that those who criticise the profession do not understand the teacher's role. Again, what is interesting here is not necessarily whether his comments about teachers' social status can be understood as being objectively true but rather what function they perform within his professional self-narrative. He positions the profession and, by extension, himself, as being in opposition to the negative judgements passed upon them by, among others, parents and the media. He characterises the commentary upon teachers in the media as slander: “I just got sick and tired of that *slander* week after week”.

The perceived fall in social status of the teaching profession is also a concern for Janet, who again is of the same generation as John and as Roy. Janet took early retirement in recent years, a decision that is informed in part by a change in school management. In her narrative this change can be linked to her subsequent perception of a fall in status at the meso-level of the school, particularly around the concepts of voice and recognition. Status at the macro-level emerges as a theme from Janet's interview

narrative in a slightly different way to that of John and Roy. She does not consider it explicitly in terms of her own self-narrative but rather in terms of a general commentary on the profession and, in particular, on newer entrants to the profession. She links her perception that ambitious students no longer want to enter teaching to the profession's fall in social status. She questions the calibre of the graduates that are entering the profession: "one wonders, the criteria now on which em students for the PME¹⁵ now, what, what are the criteria for", thus implying that the pre-entry academic standard among candidates is no longer as high as it was.

Janet does not position social status as being a factor in her personal perception of her teaching identity. However, as in the examples of John and Roy, even where the discussion is ostensibly about the profession in general, the inclusion of the comments in the interview narrative suggests that there is an element within them of a reflection of the individual's self-narrative. In this case, the comments made by participants about how the fall in social status is one of the factors that they perceive as making the profession less attractive to graduates suggests that it is perhaps an aspect of their professional identity to which they attribute a certain importance.

Teaching and financial status

Another marker of status that falls under the rubric of external markers is the financial marker. This is of course closely linked to social status but is not exactly the same, as one could arguably sustain a high social status based on cultural and other markers rather than financial ones, although this is perhaps becoming increasingly rare in the current global context. Regarding the interview narratives, it is unsurprising that financial status featured as one of the themes, particularly given that the context in which the interviews took place was one where, as mentioned in Chapter 2, teachers and public sector workers had experienced a period of pay cuts. Indeed, it is perhaps surprising that financial status was not actually more prevalent as a theme. It emerged as a relatively dominant theme in one interview narrative, that of John, but otherwise was a minor theme. It could be argued that the issue of worsening working conditions, which was raised by most of the participants, is linked to the question of financial status but,

¹⁵ PME refers to the Professional Master in Education, one of the teacher education qualifications eligible for registration with the Teaching Council in Ireland and the only consecutive teacher education qualification.

nevertheless, explicit reference to financial status was less prevalent than had been anticipated based on the temporal context of the interviews.

Where financial status was raised, however, it appeared to operate in a similar manner to the question of social status above, with participants positioning relative financial status as one of the factors which would be important in terms of the profession's identity in the future, particularly in terms of the type of graduate it attracted. Janet highlights a quote made by a former president of the ASTI [teacher union] about the financial status of teachers:

“Bernardine O’Sullivan was, she was the president of the ASTI at the time, and she was saying that a fellow would be, a fellow would be afraid to admit to a girl that he met in the disco that he was actually a teacher because he wouldn’t be able to afford or support”.

John, when discussing private sector criticism of public sector pay, argues that,

“[u]nless you’re prepared to pay more tax, ultimately the people who are going to be teaching *your* children lads, are going to be muppets.”

This positioning of financial status as a concern for others can be interpreted as being part of a narrative process whereby there is a reluctance to explicitly acknowledge that external markers of status are an important aspect of one’s own self-concept.

Carmel, for example, doesn’t raise the question of financial status until near the very end of her interview, when she is discussing the contrast in the perception and the reality of teachers’ financial circumstances:

“And then you’ve people with the huge mortgage and they’re working full-time and....And yet, those people are maybe looking down their nose and thinking oh those ones, it’s easy for them....they’re the ones maybe that are really caught in a trap, do you know what I mean? Again, I’m trying to say, I think that it’s that middle issue, that people in the middle sometimes....you know you’re not wealthy but you’re kind of, but what you earn you spend.”

Indeed, Carmel chooses to end the interview at this point, as though it has moved into an area she is unwilling to discuss or to incorporate into her professional narrative of identity, which, as pointed out already, positions her as carrying a strong educational philosophy and a sense of commitment and conviction.

This reluctance to raise financial status as an element of professional status carries through in the way that questions of financial status are brought into the narrative in the form of a concern for and of the profession as a whole. This is done in a way that protects the normative narrative of teachers as not being driven by money. For

example, both Fiona and John stress this point, saying respectively, “we know that, in general, teachers are not motivated by money, they don’t go into teaching to make money” and “there’s something in a person who wants to be a teacher that means that they would do it whether they’re being paid or not”. However, as John argues, it is disingenuous and short-sighted to position financial reward as being something that is not important to teachers, going on to complete the sentence above by observing that, “[i]t’s nice to be paid though”.

John, indeed, is explicit in linking financial status, social status and professional identity together and uses the metaphor of the types of cars driven by teachers to illustrate this point:

“When you go to a car park in a school, how many new cars would you see there? So the kids are inside, they’re looking out at all the clapped-out cars. And they’re thinking, I don’t really want to do that job. And the teacher at the front is telling them what a great job it is and you know, how it’s a nice thing to do and...the young fella’s thinking, ah no, no...no I’m going to become an accountant. Or I’m going to sell drugs for the Kinahans or whatever it is.”

John is the only research participant to so explicitly position these types of external markers of status as essential to the identity and self-concept of the profession, comparing the salaries of private sector workers to the post-recession salaries of teachers and uses the examples of the recent pay cuts to argue that,

“if that’s how we’re going to treat an entire profession, you, you are gradually...seep, things seep out of a psyche...that sense of respect [...] Unless you can have...a sense of worth as an inbuilt thing in a profession, then you have a major problem ahead.”

In raising these points, John is arguably more attuned to, or more willing to admit to, the essential role played by external markers of status in the construction of professional identity than some of the other research participants. This idea of professional identity as being linked with social and financial status is one that is interwoven throughout John’s interview narrative and, indeed, in his narrative of identity. He is adamant that he has never had cause to doubt his social status, regardless of where he stood financially,

“I never felt inferior to anybody else, no matter what it is that they did. [...] at my right shoulder is a man who earned 1.4 million as a banker last year and I don’t feel one bit inferior to him. And I never did.”

However, despite his stated conviction in teaching’s inherent worth as a profession, he is nevertheless firmly of the opinion that the financial status of the profession has at

present fallen so far in relative terms that, together with the associated fall in social status, teaching has become an unattractive career for talented or ambitious graduates. He uses the terms “muppets” and “moron” to describe the type of person that will end up in teaching if the profession’s status continues to fall.

Financial status cannot be ignored in terms of the dignity of teachers, a point John is perhaps well placed to observe given that, as a principal, he could see in concrete terms the financial impact of austerity on the newer entrants to teaching in his school. Similarly, social status is undeniably part of that which enables teachers to maintain a sense of self-esteem. His own strongly developed sense of educational values and professional integrity enables John, like some of the participants in Santoro’s work, to feel “really good about being able to say I teach” (2013, p.570). It is perhaps because of this confidence in himself as a teacher and in the societal value of teaching that he is able to recognise and articulate that external markers of status do play a crucial role in terms of teacher identity, and that these markers operate alongside the more personal or pedagogical ones. Focusing on the altruistic and vocational elements of teaching is not enough in terms of negotiating and resisting the challenges of the deprofessionalisation of teaching. Without articulating the importance of social and financial status, it is perhaps more difficult to adjust to that loss of status because it is in defining a problem that its resolution begins. John uses his interview narrative to make this point very strongly, saying that the teacher unions have failed in their messaging around this particular issue:

“that is what the teacher unions should be looking for. I think that’s a message you can sell. You know, rather than this obfuscation and...long-winded explanations of why we’re not going to do this. Say listen, we’re talking about dignity here. Do you want the teacher of your child to be a stupid moron? Yes or no? If you don’t, pay the money. If you do, let’s carry on the way we are.”

John’s narrative around the status of the teaching profession, which is seemingly well-practiced, draws on statistics and quotations to argue for the necessity of restoring teachers’ financial and social status in order to develop a more positive professional identity. These are inarguably important elements of the profession’s sense of self-worth and John’s linking of them to the concept of dignity is an important argument, particularly in the current context of increasing employment precarity and insecurity. However, these external sources of status must be balanced with equally strong internal sources that draw on professional markers of worth from within the educational domain.

Without these internal markers, such as a sense of voice and agency, a perception of autonomy and a commitment to relational accountability, it becomes more difficult to negotiate the challenge of inevitable threats to external sources of status.

Teaching and status change: a counter-example

There is one exception in terms of the research participants' position towards the profession's status at a macro-level. Where all the other participants are more or less agreed that the profession's status was falling to some degree, Sinéad takes the opposite position, suggesting that the teaching's professional status in the Irish context has improved over the course of her career. She positions policy initiatives like the 2006 establishment of the Teaching Council and the introduction of School Self Evaluation as being positive developments for the profession, a position that is also taken in the literature by Coolahan and by Hogan, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, this perception is not echoed by the other research participants, many of whom are in fact quite scathing of the Council and associated policy developments.

Sinéad takes this position because she perceives such policies as positively reinforcing the professional status of teaching, something she feels it did not have at the time she began her career. She explicitly links this to gender bias, explaining that when she was starting her career, teaching was seen as a feminised profession. In her view, this lessened people's perceptions of its status in relation to other, more traditionally male-dominated professions:

“I think for too long...em, in a sense of the, the wider civil service, we were seen as maybe, as the...ah sure it's not a...I mean, I can remember comments like when I started teaching, great job for a woman. [...] And I always...oh that jarred on me anyway, no matter what job you're doing, for anyone to make a comment like that...but I remember those kind of comments.”

She is of the opinion that policy initiatives such as the establishment of the Teaching Council go some way towards lessening this perception. She argues that they contribute to the development of a more formal professional status for teachers:

“if you look at the Teaching Council, if you look at the, almost the...formal professionalisation of our, our role and our job, I think that has been em a huge em...I think it has been hugely important. [...] I remember thinking, well, this is what we need, we need this kind of professional recognition. That this is, it is a profession, absolutely a profession. Em and that this Teaching Council establishes that in a sense

and allows the kind of regulation of the profession in a sense. So we have a regulatory body. So...so do other professions and that puts us there.”

There is a question of gender dynamics and power within this, as attested to by her conviction that the professionalisation of teaching “puts us there” beside other professions, rather than teaching being cast outside the sphere of established professions and perceived as “a great job for a woman”. Teaching’s formalisation as a profession means that the narrative of it being lesser than other professions can be rejected, a development that Sinéad perceives as important both in terms of professional recognition and in terms of gender equality.

Sinéad’s more positive perception of the changing status of the profession at a macro-level could be linked to her own positive sense of status and professional self-concept at the micro-level. While, of course, a causal link cannot be established, her narrative around status suggests that the experience of having a strong sense of voice and agency and a reflexivity around these concepts allow her to avoid a sense of defensiveness when faced with changes at the macro-level and, rather, to engage with and interpret these changes in a way that contributes to her positive perception of the profession’s status.

3. Power and Ethics

Status, agency, and power

As has been discussed in this chapter, the theme of status intersects and interacts with the concepts of voice, affect, and agency in nuanced ways throughout the interview narratives and professional identities of the research participants. This process of interaction has implications for the manner in which teachers interpret and enact change and policy initiatives at the school and national level. Within this process, the concepts of agency and affect, especially vulnerability, come through strongly as core factors influencing the nature of teachers’ interpretations of change. This aligns itself with the literature, as discussed in Chapter 3. As we have seen in the discussion of the theme of status as it emerged from the interviews, change can lead to reactions on a spectrum from defensiveness to optimism. The participants were, for the most part, not located at either extreme of this spectrum but rather somewhere along it, although tending towards

the more defensive end. The key factor in terms of whether or not the teachers approach change defensively appears to be their interpretations of their status, as understood in the sense of voice and recognition. For example, Sinéad and Evelyn, who each position themselves as benefiting from strong collegial relationships and a sense of being heard within their schools, appear to be prepared to approach policy change with an openness towards its merits. On the other hand, Roy, whose personal sense of status is characterised by uncertainty and isolation, approaches the same changes defensively and warily. The relationship between voice, recognition and interpretations of change will be further explored in the next chapter.

The findings discussed in this chapter around the theme of status and its intersections with voice and agency can all be linked to the operation of power. The participants' experiences and observations around these concepts, when viewed through the lens of power, can be understood in terms of a complex and shifting negotiation between the individual's self-concept and various external narratives. Vulnerability is at the core of this, both in the sense of the singular narrative as vulnerable to dominant narratives and in the sense of the interdependent vulnerability of individuals in educational settings. The key to the construction of a successful and sustainable narrative of professional identity is rooted in the question of where the balance of power lies. For example, where the individual has a strong sense of agency and voice, and thus personal power, within their narrative at one level, it is more likely that they will be able to interpret the operation of power at another level in a positive or constructive way. This is seen in Sinéad's attitude towards school evaluation processes, where the ownership she feels around her school-based evaluation means that she is able to frame the external evaluation in a positive light. On the other hand, if agency and voice is perceived to be removed or constricted in one area, then the individual may seek to express power in another area. This can be seen in Janet's reaction to the perceived loss of voice and recognition after a change in school management, following which she becomes wary of change more broadly, leading to her criticism of and rejection of changes at the macro-level.

Indeed, power and its operation came to the fore as a meta-theme throughout all of the themes that emerged from the analysis. Chapter 7 will focus on the questions of autonomy and accountability, where much of the participants' critique of accountability mechanisms can be understood through the perspective of power and changes in the

participants' perceptions of their individual power within their career narratives. The argument that emerges from that chapter, that one of the obstacles to the development of an ethical and sustainable professionalism is the dominance of a punitive accountability model, is one that very much hinges on an understanding of power as an essential component of this process. Where power is imposed externally, leaving little room for autonomy within an individual's narrative, the individual's expressions of power are more likely to be negatively focused, using agency as a means of resistance or rejection rather than exploring new narrative possibilities.

Similarly, the second findings chapter, Chapter 6, can be understood through the lens of power and its role in the manner in which agency and affect operate in a professional narrative. That chapter will focus on the theme of relationality and the concepts of collegiality, individualism, and competition as they emerged from the interview narratives. In the research participants' characterisations of the context of Irish education as historically lacking in collegiality, the subsequent, related, positioning of the newer generation of teaching entrants as competition, and the antagonistic language used to describe some of that generation, we can see a struggle for the maintenance of individual power in a context unfamiliar with the idea of the sharing and dispersal of power.

In the current chapter, the theme of status and the concepts of voice and agency add to the understanding of the nuanced ways in which power operates in the professional identity narratives of the research participants and influences the participants' interpretations of and engagement with ongoing changes in their immediate contexts and in the context of broader policy and societal changes. The final section of this chapter considers the theme of power in more detail, with a particular focus on the intersection of power with the concept of control. This discussion leads to an exploration of the ethics of care, looking at how the suppression of vulnerability in teacher identity can be linked to a negative expression of power when there is a perception of threat to the profession's status. Emphasising an ethos of recognition and relationality across the teaching profession that allows for vulnerability and fallibility would better prepare teachers to negotiate the challenge of externally imposed changes without losing sight of the ethics of care that is at the heart of the educational relation.

Powerlessness or power shift?

As discussed above in the presentation of the findings around status, there is a perception that the status of teachers has changed over the course of recent decades. While it is difficult to pinpoint a particular moment or impetus for this change, the research participants' observations appear to converge around the late 1990s as a starting point for the perceived changes to teacher professionalism and status. For those of the participants who mentioned them, there was general consensus that the industrial actions around benchmarking and substitution and supervision that occurred in the late 1990s and into the early 2000s were badly judged and resulted in long-term damage to the public perception of the profession. This aligns itself with the literature on the period. As John describes it:

“the 2001, that strike...that was *hugely* ah.....destructive. [...] That tactic I think brought a lot of, you could argue, rightful disdain”.

Interestingly, the industrial action of this period is in a way disowned by some of the research participants, perhaps protecting their self-concept by rejecting any responsibility they may have had within a process that ultimately did not benefit their professional identity. For example, Roy says of the vote for industrial action related to the benchmarking process:

“at the time...I wasn't paying much attention to what was going on...most teachers weren't...then out of nowhere, we had the union telling us there was going to be a vote..and...they were recommending that we vote for industrial action...now the thing about it is, we weren't...most of us weren't tuned in and I'm speaking for myself and I'm speaking for the majority...the thing is, people were so tied up with themselves, we weren't watching the news or things like that.”

Mary's comments on the same period appear to corroborate Roy's description of his colleagues as not being informed about the details of the debates during this period of industrial action:

“We all went up in the school bus and got hammered. We were all standing outside..eh...the Dáil, picketing...I can't even remember what we were picketing for.”

These recollections of this time period are interesting in the context of its subsequent positioning as a turning point in terms of the perception and status of the profession. While of course these assessments of the period are subjective ones, it is worth noting that they point to a certain lack of informed agency by teachers in a decision that would ultimately be quite consequential in terms of the profession's status. John traces some of the distrust within the profession of the main teaching union's decision-making

processes to this period, although he also says that, even given the union's poor decisions, the profession would nevertheless be in a far worse position without it.

The positioning of this period as the start of a period of change in terms of the status and power of the teaching profession is echoed throughout the interviews and it is often paired with the 2008 changes to pay and working conditions as the two principal policy moments that have shaped the professional narratives of the participants. The period following 2008 is defined in the interview narratives in two ways, depending on the participant's generational cohort. This difference in perception is linked to the differing impacts for teachers of decisions made after the economic recession of 2008 depending on their length of service. This policy had the effect of damaging the collective agency of the profession as it created divides between teachers who could take early retirement, teachers who remained in the profession under worsening employment conditions and new entrants to the profession who, from 2011 onwards, began their career on a lower pay-scale than their colleagues.

In the interview narratives, the impact of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009 [FEMPI] is viewed in two different ways. For those who are of the older cohort, like Janet, it is viewed in financial terms and in terms of what this says about the profession's social status:

“some of us are still paying the results for the, for the strikes in the 2008s and 9s and the FEMPI, financial whatever, that what should have been our, what should have been my lump sum was not the lump sum I got....that was 2007, 2008.”

For the younger cohort, who did not have the option of early retirement, the period following 2009 is viewed in terms of an intensification and bureaucratisation of working conditions and a perception of a diminished sense of status and agency, linked to a perceived lessening of power within one's professional narrative. Indeed, Carmel explicitly refers to this sense of a change in the public perception of teachers and an associated loss of social status:

“And also everybody *hates* teachers [...] Oh my God, it's so pervasive, yes. *There's* a change [...] Like, when I started teaching everybody thought...oh, you'd get teased about the holidays obviously [...] But it might have been...a lot of people would have thought, they'd say oh well it's a good job. And people might be more inclined to say, sure you work hard.”

Carmel's perception of a fall in the profession's social status is accompanied by her perception that there is a change to the positioning of teachers within schools. She uses the concept of power in her observations around this change:

"I just think that you just, some of the...problems...the, the, the...what's not nice about teaching now is that maybe powerlessness" [...] "What affects morale I think is... is an inability, a lack of...a powerlessness sometimes when things go wrong, yeah."

This sense of powerlessness is one that emerges in some form from many of the interview narratives, connected in varying ways to the participants' engagements with and perceptions of management, students, policy and society. This can be linked to international discourses and policy trends around professionalisation, such as accountability and standardisation. These are certainly elements of the current educational context in Ireland. However, current contexts cannot be removed from their historical background and, by placing the interview narratives firmly within their temporal national context, there is room for another interpretation of the changes in status, agency and power that emerge from the interview narratives.

In this alternative interpretation, it is perhaps less helpful to speak in terms of powerlessness and rather more useful to consider the professional identity narratives in terms of a power shift. In the period covered by the interview narratives, there has been a clear shift in terms of the locus of power within the context of Irish education. Stemming from the National Education Convention in 1993 and continuing onwards through to the current context, there has been an emphasis in policy rhetoric on the inclusion of non-traditional stakeholders in the policy process, as well as a growing emphasis on the concepts of student and parent voice, as outlined in Chapter 2. While these aims have not necessarily been achieved and, in some cases, could be perceived as being no more than lip service to the concept of inclusion, it is perhaps true that the locus of power is more dispersed than it was in the years before the 1990s. Together with the formal recognition of student and parent voice, there has arguably been a more informal shift in terms of the power relationships between teachers and other stakeholders, related to social status and cultural factors. In this interpretation, when the interview narratives are read within the changing context of Irish education and society, one could argue that the concerns around a fall in status and the associated loss of power are linked to a reluctance to view the dispersal of power as a potentially positive development for the system as a whole.

In order to understand this, it is necessary to interrogate the apparent reluctance to frame the shift in the operation of power in positive terms. In attempting to understand why a shift in the locus of power is framed in negative terms, it is worth considering the historic interpretation of power in the Irish post-primary system. The concept of control is a key element of the type of power that dominated educational contexts in Ireland for many years. This could be linked to the perception in the Irish context that ‘good teaching’ is associated with control (McGarr & McCormack 2014; Devine *et al.* 2013; Sugrue 2006), in that the ‘good’ teacher was seen as one who had complete control over their classroom and students. As John, who has over 30 years’ experience in single-sex boys’ schools in urban contexts, observes, “it is seen to be the case, that if you pass by a classroom and there’s complete silence, then things must be going really well”. This control was one informed by an authoritarian and hierarchical understanding of power. It is important to note that this understanding informed not only teacher-student relationships but also the positioning of teachers within society, with parents and communities traditionally excluded from, for example, the education policy process (Gleeson 2010). Following this, a loss of power as control means a necessary reframing of what it is to be a ‘good’ teacher.

Power and control

In terms of gaining an understanding of the historic interpretation of power and control in Irish education, one of the important points that emerged from the interviews was the relatively recent abolishment of corporal punishment. The point of this is that current conceptions of control are necessarily influenced by their historical context, particularly when that context is recent enough to form part of some teachers’ narratives of professional identity. For many of the participants, and indeed for the researcher, the concept of corporal punishment seems like a distant relic of the past. As Carmel observes when trying to understand why people have a negative perception of teachers:

“it’s not the fifties anymore, it’s not Frank McCourt. [...] Like, I could understand maybe my parents’ generation thinking that, where they were hit and it was appalling really, you know. But that’s *long* gone. You know?”

However, two of the interview narratives challenge the assumption that corporal punishment is so distantly located in history. For both Roy and John, the abolishment of corporal punishment in 1982 is a key moment in their professional narratives.

Importantly, neither individual condones its use and they both state clearly that it needed to be abolished. The observations made by Roy and John around the use of corporal punishment and the perceived implications of its abolishment are interesting not so much in terms of the act itself but in terms of the interpretation and operation of power and control within the context of education.

John is completely unambiguous about his stance towards corporal punishment, calling it a “child abuse scandal” in which students were “battered” and “beaten up”. He describes how he would certainly have left the profession had it not been abolished:

“I told my mother and father that I was going to leave teaching at Christmas, that I’d given it a good lash and without, I wasn’t going to go around beating up other people’s kids, I just wasn’t going to do it. Ah and now, while they respected my view, I know my father was disappointed, ah he said, well you always wanted to be a teacher, I said yeah but I’m not going to deal with this, I’m just, I’m not going to get involved in this, I thought it was horrific”.

The position John takes towards corporal punishment is in alignment with the educational philosophy that emerges from his narrative, in which teachers’ duty of care towards their students is central. Viewing his narrative through the work of Cavarero and Butler, the abolishment of corporal punishment represents an exemplary moment in John’s narrative through which he brings meaning and coherence to his teacher identity. Before this moment, his ‘desired self’ as a teacher was at odds with the dominant model of teaching in his professional environment. His refusal to perform the script of power and control that involved “beating up other people’s kids” meant that his teacher self did not fit within the limits of acceptability of the normative teacher. This is clear in his description of his fraught meetings with his principal that led to his decision at the time to leave teaching. Following the abolishment, which came just a few weeks after the conversation with his parents he recounts above, the parameters of what it meant to be a teacher shifted, opening up the possibility for John to remain in the profession without abandoning his ‘desired self’. In his narrative, John characterises the 35 years following this moment as “a joy”, a position that can in part be attributed to the shift in the dominant discourse of teaching that made it possible for him to bring his ideal or desired self as a teacher into existence.

Roy’s stance is somewhat more complex, containing within it the ambiguity and profound ambivalence that features throughout his narrative. He admits having given

students “a rap across the knuckles” and although he expresses regret at having done this, he nevertheless goes on to say that,

“it worked in that sense ...that they knew what you could do...and you, that was just a gentle reminder, look I can murder you if you ... see you can be very friendly and all the rest and...giving someone a whack across the knuckles...usually at the beginning of a year this would happen...and then of course that’d be it, there’d be no trouble for the rest of the year then.”

Ultimately, Roy does not condone corporal punishment but, in terms of the interpretation of power and control being discussed here, it is interesting that he is of the opinion that after its abolishment, “the fear went” and that the implications of this for classroom management was a negative effect of that particular policy change. Roy’s perspective highlights the presence of a particular type of power within the student-teacher dynamic that was traditionally based on control and authoritarianism. John’s description of the atmosphere within his school points similarly to the dominance of this type of power as a key feature of student-teacher relationships and, indeed, he says that there was “a spate of resignations and early retirements” from his school in the years following its abolishment, primarily amongst those teachers who had been the most frequent users of that form of punishment.

However, John points out that the simple abolishment of corporal punishment, while it eliminated the visible operation of this type of negative power and control, did not mean that student-teacher relationships immediately became positive. He argues strongly that another form of negative power persisted in the form of what he calls “emotional bullying”, which is another way of teachers controlling students through negative mechanisms rooted in authoritarianism:

“Well, it’s...it’s ah...I’m try...I’m struggling for, for the right phrase for it...isn’t it a great *illusion* that we hold? [...] That there’s no corporal punishment anymore. And much more to the point, what about the other emotional bullying. And what about the sarcasm and all of that, that have to some extent been allowed to replace control mechanisms [...] You know? Is there anything worse than a cutting remark for a thirteen, fourteen year old boy or girl? You know, it’s..they remember it for life”.

The word “illusion” draws attention here to the slow process that is involved in changing the core of the educational relation from one in which there was an underlying ethos of power and control to one which is rooted in recognition and interdependency. While there has undoubtedly been enormous progress in this direction in the Irish context, the traces of the historical relation of control and dominance would

not have simply disappeared with the abolishment of the physical expression of it, as John rightly points out.

In this assessment of the way power operated post-corporal punishment in the Irish context, John highlights an element of the teacher-student relationship that emerged from a number of the interview narratives, that is, of a certain ambiguity in the way teachers characterised students. This ambiguity came to the fore very clearly in some cases and, indeed, some of the language used could be described as being quite antagonistic. For example, Roy speaks of “exchanging insults” with students and describes students as being “vindictive” and uses derogatory terms about certain students with whom he has had discipline issues. However, Roy’s narrative, as discussed before, is one marked by a negative self-concept and an explicit acknowledgment that he had, as he puts it, “a low time in teaching”.

Perhaps more interesting for this analysis are those examples that are more nuanced, particularly where the positioning of students seems in some way to contradict a teacher’s professional narrative and self-concept. One example of this type of complexity emerged, for example, from Mary’s narrative. She describes at one stage in her interview how she has, since becoming a mother, developed “a ton of empathy” for her students and positions herself as a caring figure, particularly in terms of her work as a resource teacher for students requiring extra learning support. However, at another point in her interview she talks of how she appreciates her older colleagues supporting her earlier in her career by having “killed kids that were horrible to me”, a position towards her students that reads as being quite antagonistic. Of course, it is natural for such contradictions and complexities to co-exist within a narrative of identity and one statement does not render the other untrue. However, this example is interesting in terms of how it arguably positions the students’ wellbeing as being subservient to the affective needs of the teacher, an echo perhaps of John’s assessment of the teacher-student power dynamics that make him uneasy.

Another group of examples that is interesting in terms of the positioning of students by teachers and the complexities of this process relates to the narrative constructed by teachers around the concept of the ‘good’ student. In this regard, some of the research participants who have relatively positive professional narratives, who characterise themselves as being driven by a strong educational philosophy and a committed sense of social justice, and who are critical of the perceived increase in

competitive individualism appear to use the very discourses they criticise when referring to their students. Fiona and Janet, for example, while never using antagonistic language to describe their students, do position them in terms of their relative academic ability and background and appear to value those students who display qualities of self-management and good discipline more than others. The operation of individualism and competition within the interview narratives will be further discussed in Chapter 6, where the concepts of recognition and interdependency are proposed as a more sustainable model of relationality within teacher professionalism.

Evelyn's narrative tends to position itself as a counterbalance to the dominant discourse. Indeed, she explicitly frames her narrative in this way, positioning herself as somewhat of an outsider and an observer, both because she came late to teaching in Ireland and also because she works outside the mainstream. Evelyn's evident pride in the quality of the relationships in the school in which she now works is in stark contrast to her description of the competitive and isolationist atmosphere she perceived to be the norm in mainstream schools. Her career narrative and her interpretation of it finds an echo in the experience of one of the participants in Santoro's 2013 paper on teaching integrity, Stephanie, whose "many moves to find the right teaching fit speaks to her belief that teaching is a practice that exceeds institutional bounds" (2013, p. 574). Similarly, Evelyn's choice to teach outside the mainstream in the Irish context is explained and justified in her interview narrative in terms of her strongly developed beliefs about education and teaching, particularly around relationships and the ethics of care in the educational relation. As a result of this positioning, her narrative draws attention to some practices and norms in the context of mainstream post-primary education that are at odds with her educational values.

One of the observations Evelyn makes that is useful in terms of the interpretation of the operation of power and control is that her school has been the subject of criticisms such as that they "mollycoddle" students. She characterises these criticisms as stemming from an unwillingness to position students as equal to teachers and to place their wellbeing to the forefront of their education. She claims that she has personally benefitted greatly from the enhanced rapport that this approach allows and is proud of the fact her school has helped students who would otherwise have "fallen by the wayside". She wonders whether in this, the education system hasn't "quite caught up with changes in society" in terms of its approach to the ethics of care, a concern that

was highlighted by John Coolahan as one of the principal challenges facing the Irish teaching profession (2001). As discussed when outlining the study's national context, the idea of the individualisation of responsibility arguably pre-dates the advent of the mercantile paradigm in the context of Irish education. The traces of this discourse can be seen in the manner in which vulnerability in students is denied and an ethics of care towards this vulnerability is positioned as "mollycoddling". This has its effects on teacher identity because, if attention to vulnerability is denied in the relationship between students and teachers, it is unlikely to be permitted in the relationships amongst teachers. The suppression of vulnerability serves to deny the essential interdependency between individuals and emphasises instead a performance of self-control and individualised responsibility.

4. Conclusion

The findings discussed in this chapter and their convergence around the themes of status and power suggest that a teacher identity rooted in external markers of status and a hierarchical interpretation of power is poorly prepared to negotiate the challenges of the professionalisation of teaching. By placing the findings within their historical context and viewing them through the perspective of the literatures on teacher identity and on Irish education, there appears to be a strong case for the argument that neglecting the role of affect within educational and policy processes contributes to a sense of professional identity that is rooted in defensiveness and a negative entrenchment in the face of change. Without acknowledging that vulnerability and fallibility are an inevitable part of any professional narrative, teachers will struggle to deal with challenges to their self-concept or changes to their status.

In a similar fashion, the concept of vulnerability is closely linked to power and to the perceived levels of agency and control teachers have within their professional narrative. There is an element of fear and vulnerability in the interpretations of some of the research participants of the shifts in power that have been a feature of education in Ireland in recent years. This stems from the perception of a fall in status and loss of agency, along with the feeling of powerlessness that accompanies externally imposed changes in which teachers feel they have little voice. The temporal contextualisation of

the interview narratives is also important in terms of the theme of voice and its interaction with the theme of status. The teachers' narratives span a period from the late 1970s to the current moment in which there have been a number of policy changes which have influenced teachers' working lives. Particularly since the 1990s, these changes have accelerated and intensified and have been in some cases the subject of resistance on behalf of the profession because of a perception of change fatigue and of a lack of attention to teacher voice. As discussed in Chapter 3, if a sense of voice and ownership at a macro-level is not experienced by teachers, there are potentially negative implications for a positive professional identity at the micro-level. Individual teacher agency is threatened and vulnerability is increased because of a perceived lack of power over one's professional working conditions and environment.

The positive experiences within the interview narratives, where teachers successfully negotiated changes or challenges to their personal or professional status or where a change in the locus of power within education was welcomed, all had one thing in common. This is that the teacher in question had a strong sense of recognition of the self during the experience. This was the case with Mary feeling she was heard within her school planning process, Evelyn describing the democratic relationships amongst her colleagues and between herself and her students, John being able to bring his desired teaching self into being following a change in policy, or Sinéad drawing on gender to position her profession's status as improving. It is the recognition of the self as a 'who' within their professional context that allows these teachers to negotiate the demands of changes or threats to the 'what' story of the profession more broadly.

The next chapter will discuss the concept of recognition in more detail, linking it to agency and voice within the school community. This idea will be developed into a discussion of the role of relationality within the political space of the school, from the perspective of management, leadership and collegiality, and also in terms of an ethical commitment to interdependency in the educational relation. This will be contrasted with the current emphasis on competitive individualism which a number of teachers identified as an increasingly dominant feature of their professional lives. The chapter will conclude with some thoughts as to how the discourse of individualism can be resisted and challenged by bringing a relationality based on interdependent individuality to the core of an ethical teacher professionalism.

Chapter 6

Recognition and Relationality

1. Introduction

Building on the discussion in the previous chapter of the operation of status and power, this chapter develops the idea that emphasising recognition and relationality within teacher professionalism can challenge the dominant interpretations of power within the context of Irish education and can support teachers in negotiating deprofessionalisation discourses that threaten the teaching profession's status. This chapter's core themes are recognition and relationality and these themes are discussed in terms of their intersections with the concepts of collegiality, isolation, vulnerability, agency, voice, competition and individualism. The chapter is divided into three parts, the first looking at the concepts of collegiality and isolation and situating them within the theme of relationality, the second looking at recognition and voice as a means for teachers to negotiate agency within their professional contexts, and the third looking at the operation of discourses of competitive individualism.

The first part begins by discussing the concept of professional collegiality, a key concept in much of the literature on teacher professionalism that emerged strongly across the research participants' narratives. Some of the policy rhetoric around collegiality risks instrumentalising the concept in a reductive manner, given its inherent complexity. It is positioned as something that can be implemented and strategised and as a means to an end, namely better educational outcomes. However, drawing on these interview narratives, I argue that collegiality should be understood as only one part of a broader theme of relationality and that this notion of relationality should be an end in itself within the context of education. The following sections then present some contrasting experiences of collegiality and of isolation that emerged from the interviews and discuss the various interpretations of relationality that emerge from the research participants' teacher identity narratives. The last section highlights the vulnerability and

defensiveness that can arise in contexts in which there is a lack of attention to collegiality and relationality.

Following this, the second part of the chapter discusses the effects of positive and negative relationships with school management on the teacher identity narratives of the participants and the role of recognition within these relationships. Building on the work of both Cavarero and Butler on interdependency, recognition and vulnerability, the chapter argues that viewing professional collegiality through the lens of these relational concepts allows for a more holistic interpretation of collegiality than the instrumental interpretation found in policy rhetoric. The role of recognition and relationality within the policy process is also explored within this part of the chapter. Examples are discussed of some ways in which the research participants negotiated a space for their voice to be recognised within the policy enactment process and of ways in which relationality operates within the role of school leaders as policy enactment mediators.

The final part of the chapter interrogates the operation of discourses of competitive individualism within the interview narratives, locating those discourses within their historical and cultural context in order to challenge the perception that competitive individualism is a recent discourse in Irish education. The chapter closes with a discussion of the tensions between competitive individualism and an individuality based on relationality and recognition of uniqueness. Viewing this discussion through the lens of the study's theoretical framework, the notion of an interdependent individuality emerges that, when located within an ethical professionalism, challenges the atomising individualisation of current political discourses.

2. Collegiality, Isolation, and Relationality

Professional collegiality

As discussed in Chapter 3, collegiality is important in the construction of a positive self-concept and sustained motivation and commitment across a teacher's career, while the literature on teacher collegiality in the Irish education system has indicated low levels of collegiality and a high level of isolation, particularly at post-primary level. Collegiality emerged as quite a dominant concept and the manner in

which it is interpreted and lived is multifaceted. It intersects at times with the themes of isolation and individualism, but also with responsibility and autonomy. In this, these findings perhaps offer some nuance and depth to the existing literature in the same context, which has tended to focus on either the presence or absence of collegiality. The interview narratives illustrate some of the complexity of the processes through which collegiality operates temporally in the course of a teaching career.

In terms of understanding the context in which these participants' narratives are constructed, it is instructive to consider the observation made by Gleeson (2010) that, in the Irish context, there is a particularity to the interpretation of teacher autonomy, whereby the idea of the autonomous teacher is one who has complete control over the world of his or her classroom (Devine *et al.* 2013; Sugrue 2006). One interpretation of autonomy being understood in this way is that it has resulted in an accepted tradition of teachers working in isolation from each other, unpracticed in the sharing of roles, resources or burdens. This is because, given the understanding of autonomous as not depending on anybody, or not having anybody oversee your work, means that to work in any other way runs the risk of being characterised as being unable to meet the standards of an autonomous professional. The findings that emerged around collegiality and isolation from the interviews undertaken for this study appear to fit within this interpretation of autonomy in the Irish context. Many of the research participants, particularly those with over 30 years' experience, recounted experiences or observations that highlight an absence of collegiality and co-operative work, along with the corresponding assumption that a marker of professional teaching was being able to cope with the burdens of the profession on one's own.

Evelyn is particularly well-placed to observe this aspect of the Irish context as she spent a number of years teaching in two countries abroad before coming back to spend the rest of her career in Ireland. She recounts her first impressions upon entering teaching in Ireland:

“I was slightly shocked that there wasn't much interaction between teachers who were teaching the same subject. They were kind of very closed about it, whereas in [country] we would have had a department, a language department and there was an awful lot of sharing. If you had time off, you would photocopy for your [fellow] teacher, they would get you somethings that they had sourced, some information that they thought you might find useful, it was put available for everybody. But I felt, I don't know if it was the same in all schools, but I certainly felt where I was that, you know, because I was

offering to do things for people and they were looking at me thinking, like, who is this person? Why is she asking me? Em, you know, hoping that there would be ah, a bit of give and take but that wasn't to be".

By the time Evelyn started working in Ireland, she had already been teaching for a number of years and had likely emerged from the career phases Huberman calls 'career entry' and 'stabilisation' into a middle phase (Huberman 1993). This makes her teaching identity narrative particularly interesting in that many of her experiences and interpretations are informed by a conscious comparison between contexts and cultures, resulting in an interview narrative which is rich in contextual observations and demonstrates a high level of ongoing reflexivity, both around her own self-concept and her educational philosophy. While it is difficult to infer causation, there may be a correlation between this and her career path, which has been somewhat more flexible or varied than those of the other participants, moving across three different countries and across school contexts including public, private and non-mainstream.

Evelyn's unease at her return, after nearly a decade abroad, to an Irish system marked by a lack of collegiality is apparent in her observation about the territorialism she perceived in the staffroom:

"And that was another thing I found when I came back here, that em God forbid that you sat in somebody's chair, you know, that this is like, that's so-and-so's chair. You know? That's awful. I mean, I think that's...that speaks *volumes*."

This type of spatial symbolism also featured in Mary's narrative, where she recounts how, during the early years of her career, there was an inner room connected to the main staffroom, in which many of the male members of staff would gather at lunchtimes. She remembers that, when the door to this room was opened, "gales of laughter and the stink of cigarette smoke" would emerge. As a newer, female colleague, she was implicitly excluded from this space.

The lack of collegiality perceived by Evelyn in the mainstream school environments in which she worked is one of the factors that resulted in her choosing to continue her career in a non-mainstream education setting. Here, her positive experience of a different pedagogical approach has further strengthened her conviction that:

"if there was a lot more give and take within the Irish system that, that, you know, you had an English department or you had a German department or whatever where everybody was working *together* [...] I think you'd probably get a lot more out of the students."

The argument Evelyn makes here, that higher levels of professional collegiality and collectivity would be beneficial not only for teachers but also for students' educational outcomes is one that is echoed in the literature and is in itself a valid argument (Goddard *et al.* 2000). However, building from Butler's arguments about our essential vulnerability to the Other, the argument for emphasising collegiality must extend beyond outcomes-based reasoning and towards an ethical reasoning in which collegiality is emphasised as an aspect of relationality and is necessary for its intrinsic value in terms of an individual's self-understanding. The next section will draw on this idea to discuss the experiences of Roy and Fiona, whose narratives echo some of the observations Evelyn makes from her quasi-outsider perspective about the historic lack of collegiality in the Irish context and the effects this can have on teacher identities.

Isolation and competition

The narratives emerging from the interviews with Roy and with Fiona, each of whom have over 30 years' experience, include substantial periods during which they experienced professional isolation. As Roy describes his early years of teaching, the impression emerges that he did not find it an easy profession:

“I was sure for the first year I was going to be fired do you know. Because I just felt nothing was working and..well, I wasn't fired.”

He makes the connection between his early self-doubt and a perception that he was alone in having difficulties. It seems that he feels he might have had a more positive experience had he known that this was not the case, a perspective supported by arguments in the literature around mentoring and guidance for early career teachers (Hall *et al.* 2012; Flores & Day 2006). Following his difficult early years, Roy's narrative contains little improvement in terms of his experience of voice and recognition within his professional environment. The sense of professional isolation he experienced as he started his career emerges again in his description of his relationship with his principal:

“one thing that strikes me is a principal that was...that tried to suggest to me that, well you're the only person having trouble...yeah that was the kind of insinuation that was in it ...and would you consider leaving and all that.”

Over the course of time, Roy has come to realise that he was not alone in having difficulties but, as he says, it took him a long time to come to this awareness:

“it was only with passing years I gradually found out that there was a whole ...that there was other people that the same [...] but I mean it took *years* before I found that out.”

It would have been beneficial for Roy’s self-concept and professional confidence if a culture of relationality had existed which allowed for the sharing of bad experiences amongst colleagues, allowing him to learn from and be supported by others in his difficult times teaching, in other words, if a relationality existed that allowed for the expression of vulnerability and fallibility. This is an argument made strongly by Kitching *et al.* in their paper ‘It’s the little things: exploring the importance of commonplace events for early-career teachers’ motivation’ (2009), which highlights the implications of seemingly minor negative affective experiences for teacher identity. This culture of hiding vulnerability is a negative version of regulation from within the profession. It can be understood through the lens of performativity as the construction of boundaries around a model of the ‘acceptable’ teacher that does not permit the expression of vulnerability. This type of internal regulation in fact impedes a more positive version building on the suggestions made by Fullan *et al.* in their paper ‘Professional Capital as Accountability’ (2015), which positions self-regulation as one of the modes to improving standards across the profession. A more relational internal regulation would involve teachers acknowledging and expressing vulnerability and weaknesses but doing so in a collegial atmosphere where the interdependency of the members within the educational community is the basis for improvement.

The lack of collegiality and resultant isolation appears to have taken its toll on Roy in terms of his professional and, indeed, personal identity and, while he does say that he “began to wise up” in later years, it seems from his interview narrative that the affective impact of his isolated and difficult early years lasted throughout his career:

“I think I got back to enjoying teaching again when I wasn’t afraid...well of course I got to a certain point where all they could do was fire me...and when you’re near the, you know when you know you’re near the end of your career, well of course you wouldn’t like to be fired but still....it wasn’t going to ruin your life.”

It is true that he does depict the latter part of his career in more positive terms but it is arguably only positive in relation to the extent of the difficulties he had experienced in his earlier career. Furthermore, this shift in his perception does not seem to be strong enough to outweigh the negative affective impact of the periods of isolation and the absence of collegiality. Framing Roy’s narrative through the concepts of vulnerability and interdependency, it seems that the isolation and lack of support he experienced

throughout his career impeded his ability to negotiate the challenges of teaching. Had a more relational atmosphere existed within which the expression of vulnerability was more accepted and was negotiated from a position of interdependency, it is arguable that it would have been more possible for Roy to develop and sustain a positive sense of professional identity.

The professional narrative of another research participant, Fiona, has echoes of Roy's experiences with regard to collegiality and isolation. However, there is a shift in the role these themes play in her professional identity construction over the course of her career. This shift is useful in contributing to a fuller understanding of the emerging correlation between isolation, collegiality and professional identity. Roy's narrative suggests that there are some links between isolation and a negative professional identity, at least in affective terms. Fiona's narrative corroborates this and, furthermore, it suggests that the presence of collegiality can have a positive affective influence on professional identity. Over the course of her interview, Fiona maintains quite a strict chronological structure and, as her narrative moves through her career, she breaks it into phases which she describes using concepts and themes such as "stagnation and isolation" and "renewed motivation". This formalised structuring of the interview narrative, the reflexive language she uses, and her familiarity with the discourse of education research are perhaps all related to the type of postgraduate education in which she has been involved in recent years.

The chronological phases used by Fiona to structure her narrative allow a clear picture to emerge of the shifts in her interpretation of her professional identity over the course of her career. As she describes it, the early part of her career was not particularly positive in terms of her professional identity, a situation which lasted until her mid-thirties:

"So I spent, you know, basically, I started my career in 1990 and until 2006, stagnation and professional isolation characterised...that time."

Clarifying what she means by isolation, she goes on to explain that:

"I had *no* experience of collaborative work with colleagues and had little idea of what any of the teachers in my subject departments were doing. I simply clocked in every school day and taught my classes."

She emphasises that, "I wouldn't consider myself to have been alone in having that experience", a point that seems to echo Evelyn's impressions of the atmosphere she

discovered on returning to Ireland after teaching abroad. For Fiona, these sixteen years were a period from which she appears to have gained little fulfilment or satisfaction:

“overall, from my experience, I found working in schools in the years I’ve described quite difficult. Professionally, I wasn’t stimulated or energised at all through meaningful contact with colleagues.”

Fiona’s professional narrative can be seen as consisting of two major sections, separated by a moment in her personal and professional life which could be characterised as a turning point, although she doesn’t specify what exactly contributed to this turning point, other than that she felt she was stuck in a “rut”:

“I began to reflect on my professional life, and I was just over...em...my mid-thirties, around that time anyway, and realised that I needed to get out of the rut I felt I was in”.

The timing of this turning point, which was also identified by Mary as a career stage at which she reached a “crossroads”, aligns itself with the career phase Huberman (1993) calls ‘reassessment’.

One of the actions Fiona takes at this point is to start working as a tutor with an organisation that provides summer courses as continuing professional development for teachers of English. As part of this role, she experiences collaborative work for, as she states, the first time in her career:

“It was the first time in my professional life that I enjoyed the chance to collaborate with another professional, namely the course director. [...] And I planned all my sessions shaped by advice from him, and then he observed the sessions and gave feedback. And he was really ah positive and...and enthusiastic and interested in what I was doing.”

Fiona emphasises in her discussion of this role that it is this interest in what she was doing that she found most rewarding, along with the positive feedback she received from the course participants. In this, we see that it is the act of recognition that was important to her, the idea that she was no longer just ‘clocking in’ but was being recognised in the act of teaching as a unique individual who had something to bring to the role. Fiona has remained in this summer role for over a decade, saying:

“And that’s been really rewarding for me. And it has given me, you know, great confidence in my own ability...to do this kind of work.”

Her narrative draws a link between this role with its associated increase in professional collegiality and the development of a more positive sense of her professional self, suggesting that even where a teacher’s career narrative begins negatively, the

introduction of collegiality can form a key turning point from which a more positive narrative can begin to emerge.

Alternative narratives and possible futures

As suggested by the description Roy and Fiona provide of the early part of their careers, the themes of collegiality and isolation emerged strongly from their interviews and, indeed, all of the narratives contain stories or observations that, when analysed, can be seen to centre on these themes. However, in some cases these particular passages in the interview narratives recounted experiences *witnessed* by the participants rather than lived by them personally. Two examples in particular stood out in the manner in which they seem to operate as ‘exemplary moments’ in each of the identity narratives in which they appear. The way in which these examples operate raise the question of whether something needs to be experienced by an individual themselves for it to take on a formative role within their identity narrative, or whether it is sometimes enough to witness another person’s experience. Building on Cavarero’s ideas around the recognition of one’s own story, it seems that witnessing another individual’s experience can function as a type of foreshadowing of the telling of one’s own narrative or a recognition of a possible future self in the narrative of the other. This appears to be the case in these two examples, whereby another individual’s experience was witnessed by the research participants and interpreted in such a way that it became a part of their own self-narrative. In each case, the moments in question came to function as a warning of sorts that was tied up in the discourse of failure. The stories told by the teachers about these other teachers represented perhaps an unwanted narrative that could become their own future if they did not engage in constructing an alternative story.

Evelyn recounts the story of a colleague she worked with not long after her return to Ireland, highlighting this colleague’s professional isolation and the lack of support structures that were in place for her:

“there was one poor lady, [...] Em, she was really at the end of her rope...and I kind of befriended her. She had taught me, when I was very young but I knew her and I knew her family and I think some of her kids were in my class. But I really felt that she had been isolated, she really...you know, the other teachers really didn’t kind of bother with her. And she was having awful trouble with em controlling the kids in the classroom and that. But I really, I found it actually really shocking that this woman, she was literally, kind of coming towards the end of her teaching career [...] and I just thought

this was really sad, that at this point in her career there wasn't much more...kind of... looking after her. Because she really needed [...] she seemed to be having a very rough time of it”.

The concern expressed by Evelyn at the isolation experienced by this woman ties in with her observations about the lack of collegiality she felt so strongly when she started teaching in Ireland. Her experience of witnessing this professional isolation has become part of her story of her professional identity, particularly in terms of confirming to herself that her subsequent choices have been the correct ones in terms of their alignment with her educational philosophy. In discussing her current teaching role in a non-mainstream setting, one of the aspects about which she speaks most positively is the strong sense of relationality she experiences:

“Well, we, we teach as a group. And that's for me, that's what it should be. [...] And we, we are a team. And if I have something, I'm going to give it to you and I'll say, well, look, I'm doing this, why don't you do that? And to *me*, that is the way education *should* be”.

It could be argued, then, that the experience of witnessing her older colleague's isolation has taken on the function of an exemplary moment in Evelyn's narrative of identity. She draws meaning from it in that her colleague's experience represents that which she rejects, that is isolation and a lack of collegiality.

Fiona's narrative contains a similar moment of witnessing a potential future narrative against which she appears to construct her own alternative narrative. However, whereas the narrative function of this type of moment only emerged in the analysis of Evelyn's interview, Fiona is more explicit in outlining how the experience takes on the role of a warning, saying, “there but for the grace of God go I”, as she recounts the story of an older colleague who resigned early from teaching after starting to experience increasing difficulty with classroom management.

Fiona perceives her colleague as being isolated and alone in dealing with the situation. She herself does not feel that she is in a position to help her and nor does she detect any support from the staff. Fiona's use of the word ‘powerless’ is interesting here, in that it suggests that teacher agency is not just important for the individual teacher but also for the cultivation of collegial relationships:

“And the worst of it was that I felt *powerless* to help her [...] In the staffroom when this teacher wasn't present, there was silence concerning what she was going through. There was no obvious support from colleagues or from any agency outside the school that I know of.”

In Fiona's retelling of this period, her colleague's difficulties have taken on an important reflexive role, indicating to her the future narrative that may lie ahead of her. This reflexivity is distilled in her account of a particular remark by a student:

"I recall on a school trip one excellent student mention this teacher in passing and by excellent I mean he was very well-behaved and...also academically strong. Now, he was in the classes that had gone out of control for this teacher and he said that this teacher was old-fashioned in her teaching. Now I didn't say a word about the matter but what he said suggested that she hadn't up skilled in her teaching approaches over the years and now she was paying for it by being publicly humiliated and destroyed as a teacher. I'd a sense at the time that if *I* didn't make an effort to teach well [...] then there was always the possibility I could suffer the same fate as this teacher. So I did feel that sense of there but for the grace of God go I. And indeed others in the school."

This is an example of the narrative function of the 'exemplary moments' highlighted by Cavarero. It is arguably only with hindsight that it has become so explicitly a moment of warning and may not have been so distinct nor so significant at the time it occurred. However, it does occur during a period which marks a shift in Fiona's professional identity. For example, it is during this year that she applies for the summer school position discussed above. Whether or not the moment at which she heard her colleague being discussed by the student was the actual impetus for change, it does subsequently appear to have been positioned in this way in her narrative of identity. Indeed, that this moment's narrative function may have evolved over time does not make it any less true as an experience or less valid as a moment of self-understanding.

Both Fiona and Evelyn's accounts of witnessing their older colleagues' difficulties are, then, examples of how the narrative function of witnessing another's story may not be immediately obvious but may evolve and crystallise with the passing of time, particularly if the other's narrative is constructed along an alternative and, potentially, unwelcome pathway. For both individuals, witnessing the isolating effects of a lack of collegiality has become one of the elements in their own professional narratives, operating as an indicator of what might have been had they not ensured that their stories followed an alternative trajectory.

Limited collegiality, vulnerability, and defensiveness

Within the interview narratives, there were exceptions to the absence of collegiality identified in the literature on Irish education and experienced by Roy, Fiona, and Evelyn. Mary, for example, expresses her gratitude for the support of her colleagues in the early years of her career, saying that, while “[t]here’s plenty of negative anyway” from that period of her career,

“I suppose the positives would be the...the support from the staff...especially the older men...they were *so* kind”.

Mary uses terms such as “lovely” and “kind” at various points during her interview to describe these older colleagues and she positions them as having played a positive role in the construction of her professional identity in her early career. These statements may initially seem to contradict the literature which points to a lack of teacher collegiality in the Irish context. However, when analysed more closely, it seems that the support Mary describes receiving is all based around classroom management and discipline, thus fitting the arguments in the literature that collegiality as understood in the Irish context is not expressed in terms of pedagogical collaboration and therefore is not reflective of developed collegial professionalism (Hargreaves 2000). Furthermore, this form of collegiality is an instrumental engagement focused on an outcome (in this case, classroom management), rather than a more holistic collegiality stemming from a commitment to relationality.

One of the elements of Mary’s narrative that emerged during the analysis was a shift in terms of the theme of collegiality from the early part of her career to the more recent phase. While speaking of her early career, collegiality was present as a theme that carried positive connotations within it, as highlighted in the quoted excerpt. However, the collegiality and support she experienced from her older colleagues does not appear to have carried through temporally to shape the manner in which she, who is “getting close to seniority now because most of the people are gone”, positions herself in relation to her younger and new entrant colleagues. Indeed, while unpacking her interview narrative, a distinct sense of competitiveness and status anxiety emerged from the way in which she spoke of her younger colleagues. In this passage, for example, she outlines her satisfaction at realising that her students preferred her to a student teacher:

“the first years *adored* the trainee teacher initially but after about a month they were dreading her...you know, so [...] and yet one of the lads in second year said to me, “oh

no miss, you're sound, she's just...like you're a bit of fun like, there's no messing with you but you're funny and...". And you know, they had me nailed, they described me to a T..."you don't take any messing like, you know, you get the job done and..."

In speaking about her relationship with this student teacher, Mary does not appear to reciprocate the support in terms of classroom management that she had received in her early career:

"there was chaos you know...she just didn't have, like that, she didn't have the classroom management down...which takes about a month...you know, or two months...so, she em...she drowned really."

This limited type of collegiality appears to be a feature of the relationships within the school around supporting student colleagues, where any support seems to be quite superficial and aimed chiefly at not disrupting the students' learning rather than supporting the student teachers' development:

"you'd sit in initially...well, you'd like to know what they're like. [...] and then, no they sit in with me first...and then...then they teach the next day or whatever and I sit in the back....but it's up to them then really to find their feet".

The manner in which the limited type of collegiality that features in the early part of Mary's professional narrative fails to develop temporally into a supportive approach by her to her younger colleagues suggests that collegiality and mentorship need to be formally and sustainably fostered if they are to develop into the type of collegiality associated with a mature collegial profession. This formal mentoring has been introduced by the Teaching Council in Ireland in the form of 'Droichead: An Integrated Induction Framework for Newly Qualified Teachers' (Teaching Council 2016). One of the other research participants, Carmel, was an early advocate of this idea and started the training to become a mentor. However, she found the structures to be overly prescriptive and too burdensome in terms of paperwork and decided not to proceed. Carmel's critique of the Droichead programme echoes many of the criticisms made around the narrowness and prescriptiveness of policies aimed at enhancing teacher professionalism, an example perhaps of the 'paradox of autonomy' discussed in Chapter 2 (Mooney Simmie 2016; Sachs 2016).

3. Recognition and Voice: Negotiating Agency in Educational Contexts

The relational role of school leaders

The school management team, in particular the principal and deputy principal, emerged as key figures in the identity narratives of many of the research participants. These figures were not necessarily spoken about in terms of their personal characteristics or traits, that is, not as individuals themselves. Rather, they were referred to or positioned as representatives of the management level of the school. Janet's description of her relationship with one of her principals was an exception to this:

“we did have a wonderful principal that some of us were...very privileged to work with as just an ordinary colleague and then became, was appointed principal. But if you went over and above the call of duty, there was always a little bottle of wine or a, there was always a thank you card and a little box of chocolates or a little whatever...it was a personal...a huge appreciation and acknowledgement.”

However, Janet's description of her warm personal relationship with this principal is not echoed throughout other interview narratives. Indeed, if anything, her account highlights the much more impersonal terms in which most of the other research participants speak about their school management teams, and in which Janet refers to her subsequent principals. The positioning of school principals and management teams as representatives of their role rather than as individual people can be read as an example of a 'what' story taking precedence over a 'who' story. In those examples where a principal is brought into the narrative as a symbol, it is often as part of a negative or at least ambiguous experience of or observation about management style, policy change, or other challenging situations. The absence of recognition in these relationships often works both ways, with the teacher perceiving a lack of voice or agency within the decisions made by management or brought in by policy.

On the other hand, in the few cases where a principal was depicted as a 'who', that is, recognised as an individual, the relationship tended to be more of a constructive one in terms of the teacher's self-narrative. For example, Carmel describes her relationship with an early principal in a way that conveys his individuality, a “maverick” as she refers to him, and appears to position this individual as an important figure in terms of her developing confidence as a teacher. She recognises that there were imperfections in this particular principal's approach, but it is seemingly the fact that

those imperfections were visible to his colleagues that made him more relatable than the more bureaucratic style of principalship she describes experiencing at present.

The concept of voice and its intersections with affect, specifically vulnerability, emerged as a key aspect of the theme of relationality within the parts of the interview narratives that engaged with the topic of school management. The operation of these concepts can also be linked back to the theme of status, as discussed in Chapter Five, highlighting the complex manner in which each of the core themes that emerged from the findings interact with each other. Each of the research participants recounted one or more experiences of an interaction with their school principal or management team that had come to function as an ‘exemplary moment’ within their identity narrative. In most cases, these moments were ones where the research participant had experienced either a strong sense of voice or a lack thereof. When considered through the lens of recognition and relationality, this had come to contribute to their interpretation of their professional status at the micro (individual) level and at the meso (school) level. This idea of recognition, relationality and status as intersecting is important as it offers some insight into the manner in which the construction of a professional identity is informed by a teacher’s perception of their personal and professional status. This process in turn has implications for teacher motivation and commitment, and for the sustainability of a positive professional identity. While there were a number of such moments and interactions described within the interview narratives, those that are particularly interesting involve a chronological element whereby there is a sense of a ‘before and after’ in the interview narrative. By this I mean that the interactions with school management teams described by the research participants appear to represent or encapsulate a perceived change within the participant’s individual interpretation of their professional identity and status. The experiences described take on more significance in the narrative than they might have had at the time of their occurrence because they become a heuristic through which the teacher explores and explains their sense of professional identity with regard to status and recognition.

The first of these examples is taken from Janet’s interview narrative. One of the key tropes within Janet’s professional narrative is a past and present comparison around the turning point of a perceived change in the nature of school management and, in particular, school principals. Indeed, she explicitly positions the change in school management as one of the reasons behind her early retirement:

“I would put it maybe a bit more bluntly and say that...quite a number of us actually retired before we had the forty years done. Some of us, you know, 36, 37ish and em... we...would have possibly stayed had there been different management.”

The concepts of voice, status and vulnerability emerge strongly from the passages within the interview in which Janet refers to school management. As mentioned above, she valued the warmth of the relationship she had had with one of her former principals, in particular the feeling she had of being acknowledged and appreciated. She describes the religious sisters under whose management the school was for much of her early career in similar terms:

“I can honestly say there’s a huge difference between em teaching under religious sisters...yeah, because they minded, they absolutely, they took care, they minded, I mean you were part of the family. Oh they did, they, yeah, yeah, and they took great interest in everybody, you know.”

There are echoes here of Fiona’s experience of feeling recognised as an individual when she started her summer role and the significance of this act of recognition in her personal narrative. For Janet, this experience came early on, with her perception of feeling recognised and cared for as a teacher under the management of the religious sisters. She compares this relational style of management directly with the current management: “by comparison with your....let’s say your very administrative principals nowadays. They [the nuns] were very much hands-on”. This is a theme she returns to throughout the interview, the perception she has of school management as having become more distant from the staff and from the day-to-day life of the school, for example asking,

“when a principal and a deputy principal transfer their offices upstairs...what does that mean? What does that mean? That, I think, gives a huge signal.”

When read as a whole narrative, one of the primary concerns that emerges for Janet in terms of her positioning of the past as being preferable to the present appears to be a lack of affirmation and individual acknowledgement within the current relationships between management and staff. Her criticisms of newer principals as being “career” or “administrative” principals fits within the literature on new managerialism in education (Ball 2015; Lynch 2014). The nuances within Janet’s criticisms point to a lack of attention to the affective level as being one of the elements of this managerial approach to principalship that impacts most negatively on the professional identity of teachers. Without a sense of affirmation and recognition for their individual work, teachers’ sense

of personal status is placed in a more vulnerable position, from which defensiveness or professional doubt is more likely to emerge. For Janet, there is arguably a connection between her feeling of not being recognised for her efforts in the manner in which she had been accustomed to and her determined rejection of the current style of management. Her comparisons between past and present include her arguments that the system has been “dumbed down” and that newer teaching entrants do not share the same passion and convictions as previous generations. It is possible, although of course not certain, that some of these perceptions have emerged from a defensiveness and vulnerability around her own professional status arising from the challenge of adjusting to a style of management in which she perceives less space for teacher voice and affect.

Carmel’s professional narrative has echoes of Janet’s in that there is a distinct sense of a comparison between past and present, whereby the past is positioned favourably in comparison to the present. However, there is perhaps more nuance within this narrative, with an acknowledgement of the various ways in which the present may have improved upon the past. This makes it particularly instructive to consider Carmel’s experiences in terms of her relationships with school management and the manner in which the themes of voice, status and affect operate within these relationships and within the narrative built around them. In her narrative, one of the issues that emerges as problematic for her in terms of maintaining a positive professional identity is the narrowing she perceives of the space for dissent or critique. The language Carmel uses when discussing the individuals with whom she came into contact earlier in her teaching career emphasises their individuality and uniqueness of character. For example, the teachers in her first school were “strong women” and “very principled” and she paints a similar picture of the first principal she had in her current school, who has since retired. She contrasts this with the present context where, as she perceives it, “there’s no room any more for the maverick”. As she puts it, “I think you're not allowed to be critical enough. You're not *allowed*.”

She makes this point when discussing the manner in which curriculum and policy initiatives are introduced, explaining that her critique is not necessarily directed at the initiatives themselves, as she sees change as a potentially positive thing. Rather, her unease stems from the way in which those that do critique initiatives are positioned in the discourse around change:

“these things are pushed in and you feel if you say anything against it, it’s like oh well, you know, that must mean you don't want to do your work or something [...] That is it...that you're not...people don't believe that you're coming from a place maybe of genuine conviction or something.”

Reading this through the lens of the theoretical framework, it points to the dominance of the current discourses around what it is to be a teacher and the difficulty of negotiating a space for the expression of agency within these discourses. This, it seems, causes tension for Carmel in the limits it sets to the conditions of possibility for her narrative of teacher identity, particularly in terms of pursuing a narrative that is rooted in authenticity and conviction. Drawing on Santoro’s work on professional integrity, the misalignment between what Carmel believes to be good teaching and the model of teaching that she feels is being pushed on her challenges her sense of professional integrity: “[p]rofessional integrity involves maintaining alignment between what one believes to be the responsibility of the role of teacher and one’s actions in that role” (2013, p. 570). The situation is made still more difficult for Carmel because of her perception that there is a lack of space in which she can voice her concerns around this challenge to her professional integrity and be met with recognition and trust in her convictions.

Negotiating a space of agency and voice

The theme of voice is a useful lens through which to view Carmel’s narrative, particularly in its intersections with recognition, status and agency. In her critique of the current context, one of the primary causes of concern for her is the loss of voice she perceives: “[t]eachers had a lot more *say* I think in what went on twenty years ago. I don't think they have that anymore”. Like Roy and Janet, Carmel also raises the topic of staff meetings to illustrate this point:

“we’ve very few staff meetings anymore. Yeah. No, we don't really. We’ve staff briefings. But we don't really. Yeah, that's even a change. Yeah, there’s really again very little...like, I remember when I started teaching, staff meetings would go on for *hours* because everybody was fighting over things but now people don’t even do that anymore. No, they don’t. No, very little now. You’ll have one or two of the ones that will always speak out and then everybody else kind of I know is thinking, oh sure why is she bothering because nobody is going to...it’s going to be done anyway. I think there’s a feeling, now, again I think among teachers that really...you don't have any say anymore”.

Unlike in some of the other narratives however, Carmel is more measured in her critique of management, making the point that this loss of voice is not necessarily because of a change of personnel: “[b]ut it’s just, it’s a different type of school environment than it used to be”. Her narrative also differs from others in that, while she is critical of what she perceives as a diminishing space for teacher voice, she does not give in to the discourse of inevitability surrounding this development. For example, rather than simply criticising the new Junior Cycle curriculum, she actively contacts the agency entrusted with its implementation to give her input on training she has received and to request information that she feels has been inadequately provided. She acknowledges that this may not have a concrete effect and, indeed, at the time of the interview she had not had any response from them. However, it appears to be important to her own narrative of professional identity that she has engaged in this way because it helps her to maintain a sense of agency by creating a space for her voice.

This sense of agency and voice is also an important theme in the professional narrative of Sinéad, a research participant who is of the same generational cohort as Carmel but whose career narrative has been quite different in terms of their school contexts. Carmel and Sinéad’s narratives are similar in that they each position themselves as having a positive sense of professional identity which is built on strong convictions around their educational philosophies. For this reason, their narratives are interesting when read alongside each other as they illustrate the ways in which school context is such a crucial element of a teacher’s professional identity narrative, in a way that can be overlooked in the educational policymaking process, which favours a normative model of school and does not necessarily account for school-level factors that will affect the enactment of policy (Maguire *et al.* 2015).

For both Carmel and Sinéad, the space and the capacity to engage in their professional lives in an agentic manner appears to be key to sustaining this type of professional identity and to their understanding of their status within their working environments and on a broader societal level. A commonality between these two teachers is their outward-looking approach to their role as educators and their high level of engagement in continuing professional development. Both of them are or have been active members of various curriculum development groups and subject associations at regional and national levels and they maintain an active interest in and awareness of policy developments and educational literature and research. Arguably, this active

engagement in the educational world outside the immediate confines of their school has helped them to interpret changes to their professional lives in a way that does not direct their criticisms inward towards colleagues or management but rather towards a more holistic view of their school as being located within a greater context of change. As Carmel points out in discussing some of the changes she feels have been negative: “that’s not down to management now because management work very hard too”. Similarly, Sinéad refuses to position management as the scapegoat for unwelcome changes. She tells of her colleagues’ reaction to the adoption of a new policy around absenteeism and of her own response to their complaint:

“I saw other people getting upset and asking, why are we getting this, why is management giving this to us?” [...] “And you’re like going, no no, it’s not management that’s giving it to you, it’s, it’s an accountability, for yourself, a record for yourself, this is the department and if they’re wrong you need to ring them and if they’re right, well, you know where you stand.”

Sinéad and Carmel’s responses to these types of scenario, whereby rather than blaming management, they direct their questions or critique at other policy actors such as curriculum agencies or the Department of Education is perhaps a positive strategy in terms of their long-term professional identity. It contributes to their sense of voice and agency at the macro-level because, even though their actions may not have a direct effect, the act of speaking is important to them. Directing their agency and expressions of resistance externally in this manner are also important because doing so protects the interpersonal relationships at the meso-level of the school that are essential to the sustainability of a positive narrative of teacher identity.

Policy changes, voice, and vulnerability

The rhetoric within education policy around school-based evaluation mechanisms tends to position these programmes and strategies as encouraging teacher voice in school-level planning (Looking At Our School, DES 2016; 2003). However, the findings emerging from the interview narratives suggest that harnessing teacher voice is not as simple as implementing a top-down strategy. Rather, the interview narratives point to the necessity of accounting for context in the development of policy. These findings echo the work in the UK context by Maguire, Ball and Braun on the enactment of policy at school level, particularly their 2011 paper ‘*Where you stand depends on where you sit*’, where they argue that the eventual effects of any policy will differ from

its original intentions as it undergoes various interpretations during the process of its enactment. At the level of the school, policies can be influenced by a number of contextual factors, including teacher affect and vulnerability, and their perception of agency within the process.

The narrative of one of the research participants, Roy, points to the implications for policy enactment of a more negative experience of voice and agency at the level of the school. His description of school meetings is quite different to that of Mary's, who highlights how all staff members are "heard". Rather, Roy describes how

"there was this about meetings, that they're supposed to be discussions but I remember saying a thing once and...I remember literally, well being more than once told just shut up...not even an honest disagreement, just shut up...was what it was...so...so I mean a lot of us learned, look don't even, don't open your mouth."

Roy's professional identity narrative is one in which the theme of status emerges as a core concept at each level from the micro to the macro, intersecting in each case with affect in a manner that contributes to an overall sense of professional identity that is defensive and vulnerable. At the meso-level of the school, Roy appears to perceive the concept of teacher voice as being either absent, as in the quote above, or little more than a charade, as in the following quote:

"another thing that crept in with meetings too...alright, something is being brought in...but the staff had to vote for it, the staff had to agree...so, it would be put to a vote..and then there'd be a majority against it...what they'd have would be a second vote...you know that's...you got the feeling you know, you're having all these meetings...and you're more and more powerless."

This perception contributes to his sense of diminished power and status within the decision-making processes of the school, arguably a factor in his rejection of policies such as the SSE as a mere "box-ticking exercise" and his prediction that the new Junior Cycle curriculum is "just going to be ticking off half a million boxes and tonnes of aims and objectives and outcomes and this and that". By resisting these macro-level policies, he finds a space to express the agency that he perceives himself as being denied at the meso-level of the school.

Roy's wariness of the new Junior Cycle curriculum is echoed across many of the interview narratives and the research participants' discussion of the initiative often intersects with the themes of voice, autonomy and agency, in a way that suggests that, rather than the content of the curriculum itself, it is the manner of its implementation

that contributes to the less than enthusiastic adoption of the programme. Indeed, Evelyn makes this very point, basing her observation on her encounters with teachers from other schools at inservice days:

“I just think it was introduced...incorrectly. I don't know, I think it should have been rolled out *within* the schools rather than taking the teachers *out* and giving them the information to take back. I think you really have to do these things at ground level.”

As Evelyn points out, it is the positioning of teachers as subjects rather than agents of curriculum change that contributes to the resistance towards the reform. Evelyn's estimation that this model of introduction was not the best option is confirmed in the criticisms made by some of the other research participants of the Junior Cycle implementation process. Carmel, for example, is very critical of the process, observing that, “[t]here was potential there...but like they just did it in such a *stupid* way”. She goes on to criticise the inservice days she attended because,

“it's like we've been played....any time you might say something, they'd say, well, blah, blah, blah...oh that's a really good question and because and they....and I am like, I have been *played* here.”

Like Evelyn, it is not necessarily the policy itself which Carmel rejects. Indeed she acknowledges that there were good ideas within it. Rather it is the manner in which it is implemented and which positions her as feeling that she has been “played” that she criticises. Arguably then, it is a lack of agency and voice within the process that leads her to view the policy as a whole with wariness. This example, when read through the arguments in the Braun *et al.* (2011) paper mentioned above and through the theoretical framework, points to the manner in which teacher voice and its intersection with affect has important implications for the enactment of policy and, as such, needs to be considered as a key component of the education policy process.

Among some of the key policy actors when viewing the process in this manner are school management personnel, in particular principals and deputy principals. Their role can be viewed as that of an intermediary between formal or official policy actors such as national and regional education boards and the more informal level of individual teachers. For those teachers who are not themselves active in subject associations or who do not engage in, for example, teacher forums on social media, the school staff meeting can be the primary source of information for them about new policy initiatives. As such, the manner in which principals and deputy principals interpret and communicate information becomes quite important in terms of policy enactment.

As discussed above, principals and deputy principals were often positioned as core figures in the teacher identity narratives and, in many cases, the research participants' relationships with them had a substantial influence on their professional narrative, either in positive or negative terms. Furthermore, there was often a correlation between a teacher's relationship with their school management and their disposition towards new policy initiatives. In cases where the teacher perceived themselves as being heard and listened to by school management, for example in Sinéad's case, there appeared to be a greater openness to change. However, if the relationship was a less positive one, as was the case for Roy and for Janet, defensive or wary reactions to change were more prevalent. Of course, there is no way to prove a causal link or direction between these two observations, nor can they be generalised beyond the participants in this research. However, given that the school management team has a key role as an actor in the policy process whereby they may be the first point of policy engagement for individual teachers, it is arguably unsurprising that the nature of the affective relationship between teachers and management could correlate with teachers' disposition towards the enactment of particular policies. Santoro draws attention to this relational aspect of the policy process in pointing out that school leaders, both at the school level and at the regional level, should not assume "that a teacher's dissatisfaction comes merely from resistance to policy changes" (2018, pp. 1-2). Rather, it is important that school leaders look more closely at the teacher's personal reasons behind the resistance, for example, at the question of how the change might be in conflict with that teacher's personal and pedagogical moral beliefs about teaching. While Santoro's point is not necessarily about the quality of the relationship between school leaders and teachers, her observation does support the argument that the personal and the relational within the policy story matters and should not be dismissed by school leaders and policymakers.

4. Neoliberalism, Competitive Individualism, and Relationality

A cultural context of individualism

As pointed out in Chapter 2, recent research in the field of education policy analysis identifies a supranational increase in trends and discourses associated with neoliberalism (Auld & Morris 2014; Grek *et al.* 2013; Lingard 2013b; Ozga 2013). One of these discourses is that of competitive individualism, characterised by concepts such as the project of the self, responsabilisation and the self-managing individual (Ball & Olmedo 2013; Ball 2003). Given that the literature supports the position that collegiality is an underdeveloped aspect of teacher professionalism in Ireland and that isolation is a feature of Irish teachers' professional lives, it can be argued that the profession in Ireland is particularly susceptible to these discourses of individualism and competition. In other words, if it is the case that collegiality and collaboration have historically had a somewhat ambivalent presence in the Irish context, it is arguably easier for discourses of competition to take root. In a similar manner, the idea that the individual as responsible for themselves is a core concept of Catholicism and, thus, traditionally a core concept in education in Ireland, creates fertile discursive conditions for the responsabilised individual of the neoliberal era. Following this line of argument and using it as a lens through which to consider the findings that emerged from the interviews, the interplay of current and historic discourses of individualism manifests itself in a competitive vulnerability that is tied up with concerns about status and power. This section will focus on some of the ways in which the themes of collegiality, relationality, competition, and individualism intersect in the interview narratives and will locate the research participants' interpretations of these concepts in their temporal and cultural context.

The analysis showed that there was a subtle temporal shift in the manner in which the theme of individualism operated within the interview narratives. The findings discussed above around professional isolation and a lack of collegiality emerged for the most part from the sections of the interview narratives that referred to the participants' early careers, thus the end of the 1970s, through the 1980s and into the early 1990s. However, there was a slight shift in the narratives of individualism as the time period under discussion moved through the turn of the century and into recent decades. Where previously individualism had been most strongly associated with isolation, in latter

years there is a distinct association of individualism with competition. The fact that the theme of competitive individualism emerged so strongly from the parts of the interviews that discuss this era fits within the literature on the macro narrative of education in recent years. Research on education policy in contexts across Europe suggests that discourses associated with neoliberalism have had a strong shaping influence on policy narratives and initiatives. These influences have included a rise in accountability mechanisms, an increasing emphasis on data and measurement, and a growth in both endogenous and exogenous marketisation (Grek *et al* 2013; Ozga 2013; Ozga 2012). In terms of the influence of neoliberal discourses on the construction of identities, the literature highlights the dominance of the concepts of the self-managing individual and the ‘project of the self’. These concepts and their effects on processes of identity construction have been extensively examined and analysed in fields across the social sciences. The literature suggests that they have become dominant concepts within the field of education, operating as a lens through which education policy is developed and as a key influence on the manner in which students and teachers approach their respective roles (Davies & Bansel 2007; Nairn & Higgins 2007; Ball 2003).

Given the discursive dominance of neoliberal conceptions of the individual, it is unsurprising that one of the themes that emerged from this study was the operation of competitive individualism within the teaching profession. However, this identity characteristic was not positioned by the research participants as a prevalent characteristic of their own generation’s teacher identities. Rather, it was perceived by the research participants as being a particularly dominant aspect of the professional identities of younger and newly qualified teachers. In a number of the interview narratives, the participants expressed concern at the dominance of competitive individualism amongst their younger colleagues and the implications of this for the profession. Despite this, however, a closer analysis brought up some contradictions and suggested that, while characteristics of competition were explicitly attributed by the research participants to newer entrants to teaching, their own identity narratives also contained elements of these characteristics, operating in subtle and nuanced ways to shape the manner in which collegiality and relationality were lived by them.

In the analysis, it emerged that concerns around the perceived increase in competitive individualism often intersected with the themes of status and affect, suggesting that the negative effects of these discourses present a challenge to the

maintenance of a positive narrative of professional identity, even where the individual is at mid to late-stage in their career and has, thus far, had a positive self-concept. The idea of competitive individualism being a new discourse emerged particularly strongly from three interview narratives, those of Janet, Carmel, and Sinéad. Broadly speaking, each of these professional narratives was positive in an overall sense and, despite certain experiences and concerns that they recounted, each of these teachers maintained a positive self-concept and a strong sense of professional motivation and commitment. Given that their professional narratives were so positive, it is interesting that they attributed such importance to the change they perceived in the dynamics of professional identity construction amongst their younger colleagues and that they expressed concerns around the implications of this change. Through recounting interactions they had with their younger colleagues, they suggest that the younger generation's narratives of emerging professional identity are being constructed in a context that is quite different to the contexts in which they experienced their own early careers. The participants tended to reflect on the dynamics shaping the early careers of their younger colleagues in light of their own personal early career narratives, expressing a type of (possibly misplaced) nostalgia as they compared the current context to the context in which they entered the profession. Janet, for example, compared the feeling of being "looked after" that she experienced as a newly qualified teacher under religious management to the more impersonalised style of the current lay management.

However, as has been highlighted above, isolation and an absence of collegiality was a dominant aspect of the professional narratives of a number of the research participants and, as such, the macro context in which their own professional narratives developed was not immune to discourses of individualism and competition. It appears that a culture of competitiveness was the norm for Roy, with teachers being compared to each other individually based on students' attainment in their subjects, rather than working together as a cohesive group to improve attainment across subjects:

"there was this thing of these great teachers and they were all, all their students were getting As in the Leaving Cert and that and then it was being held up to the rest of us ... how come with those girls she's able to get such high grades, and you're looking at Bs and Cs and why it is there's so many As from the same students, they're obviously capable... Of course, the reason they were getting the As was they were terrorised ... and they were spending maybe three hours a night at that subject ... So..the other subjects were, were suffering".

Roy's recounting of these experiences point to a culture of competition and measurement that pre-existed the recent intensification of such cultures under neoliberal discourses. Janet and Fiona, who are of a similar generation to Roy, use the same type of language in their positioning of certain students as "good" students based on externally quantifiable markers such as their grades, suggesting that a measurement and outcome-based conceptualisation of education pre-dates the more recent shift towards competition in policy rhetoric. As argued in Chapter 2, this historical contextualisation can sometimes be forgotten in the critique of more recent education policies.

Of course, it is not the intention of the analysis to point to flaws or faults in the interview narratives, as this would be at odds with the study's epistemological position. What is interesting in highlighting the complexity and subtle contradictions of the operation of the theme of individualism is the manner in which supranational discourses are interpreted and enacted in a localised context. As such, the observations made by Janet, Carmel, and Sinéad around the growth of individualism is useful in that it points to the pervasiveness of macro-discourses of neoliberalism and their reach into the meso-level of schools and micro-levels of individual teachers in a way which, arguably, leaves little room for the construction of alternative narratives of resistance.

Teaching and strategic self-management

One of the aspects Janet highlights of this perceived shift in professional identity is the emergence of what she terms the "career principal" who is driven by "money". She suggests that there is now a tendency on the part of certain entrants to teaching to have an explicit ambition towards achieving a principalship and questions the validity of this as a reason to enter teaching:

"like, why did you enter the teaching profession, did you actually start going into [university] or wherever day one and said aha I'm going to be principal of a school?"

Janet's perception of the career principal as a teaching identity aligns itself with neoliberal discourses, representing self-management, strategic thinking, and economic interests. Of course, it is not necessarily true that the idea of a career principal is in fact new and there were likely always individuals who planned their teaching careers in this way. However, that Janet perceives this to be the case suggests that such an approach is possibly now more pervasive or more explicit.

Sinéad describes similar processes at work in the approach of her younger colleagues to their professional development:

“and I suppose, for teachers, that’s what we have become fixed on. That teacher who says, I got 4 As this year. It fascinates me. [...] There is, I suppose there’s a worrying trend in....among younger teachers....to see that as a...see that as how they’re going to get their CID [contract of indefinite duration]. Or how they’re going to get on to [...] And they’re charging up the, the, they want to *charge* to the finish line, they want to *be* at the level you’re at.”

She perceives this preoccupation with measurement and with strategic self-advancement to be potentially damaging to the long-term professional identities of these newly qualified teachers, arguing:

“and you’re saying now hold on a minute, you know, it takes a little bit more than just the determination to do it, it takes kind of some pause and some time out, some low time...to actually pull yourself back up and say, no, hang on a second.”

In her awareness here of the need to acknowledge the complexity of professional identity and to allow for “low time”, Sinéad highlights that the increased pace and pressures associated with neoliberal discourses risk creating affective strain that will have negative implications for the sustainability of a positive professional narrative. Building on this observation, it can be argued that vulnerability and “low time” as she puts it, are unavoidable elements of a teacher’s narrative and that to suppress those affective experiences is not ultimately beneficial or sustainable in terms of a teacher’s identity.

Her observations here echo the points made above around the need to acknowledge and allow room for moments of vulnerability in order to negotiate the challenges of sustaining a positive professional narrative in the longer-term. Of course, the focus on measurement and outcomes and the disavowal of vulnerability cannot be claimed to be recent phenomena in the context of Irish education. Indeed, two of the research participants who have now retired from teaching, Janet and Roy, explicitly use the language of measurement to signify ‘successful’ teaching. Furthermore, Roy’s interview narrative conveys a strong sense of the damaging effects of denied vulnerability. However, as the literature argues, while these discourses are not new to Irish education, they have intensified in recent years. It is perhaps this intensification that causes the research participants to raise concerns about them.

As Sinéad points out, this competitive element of the professional identity of newly qualified teachers is a function of the precarious employment environment in which they find themselves and the increased investment in terms of time and money that is required to qualify as a teacher: “they come out as we said at this deficit after two years of a Masters”. Janet also draws attention to this change she perceives in the professional identity narratives of her younger colleagues:

“I think one of the greatest, greatest, I suppose, damage that’s being done to the education system has been the lack of permanency for teachers, yes...the total insecurity”.

These contextual factors, as highlighted by Janet and Sinéad and as evidenced by the Ward Report (2014) on teacher working conditions and casualisation, contribute to the pressure newly qualified teachers find themselves under to invest in and maintain a strategic approach to their professional development so as to enable them to be successful in an increasingly competitive employment environment.

Carmel makes similar observations about the strategic approach of her younger colleagues to their professional narratives, characterising them as political: “[v]ery much em...younger people are very...political now. Younger teachers coming in”. When asked for clarification on what she means by political she goes on to explain:

“Em, they just know *exactly* what they need to do. Like I was very naive. I had no idea what I should be doing when I started teaching, I just wanted to learn more about stuff. Whereas they’ll rush in now and get their Masters done, it doesn’t matter what they do their Masters in but they have their Masters. And they’re doing a Masters in Education and they’ve no more interest in what it is. And they say, you know, I’m doing this now and then [...] No interest. And they won’t do it in their subject area. They’ll do it in a management area. Constant. It’s all about management now. Because you have to... em...have those degrees or higher qualifications if you want any kind of a post or anything in the future.”

This passage encapsulates many of the trends that have been extensively discussed in the literature on the self-managing individual and the way in which such individuals must engage in credentialisation, adapting their interests to the demands of a competitive employment environment at the expense of education that is of an intrinsic value to them.

This change in teachers’ approach to their careers is perceived by Carmel not just in her school but at the subject association meetings she attends, where she feels

that there has been a shift in the motivation behind younger teachers' participation in such professional development opportunities:

“a lot of people would still come but em...it's a different vibe you get from them. They're thinking about the future. They're thinking about...there's a...it's a difference there, I can't...but I see it, I do honestly see it.”

That Carmel cannot quite describe the difference she perceives is perhaps to be expected, given the elusive and complex character of neoliberal discourse, an elusiveness which of course is part of its power, in that the more difficult something is to define, the more difficult it is to resist.

One of the aspects of the newly emergent script of professional identity about which the participants expressed most concern is what they perceive as the downgrading of subject knowledge and expertise. Carmel expresses concerns about the prioritisation her younger colleagues have to make in terms of their strategic approach to their professional identities, whereby the idea of subject expertise is downgraded to allow them to invest energy and time in more instrumental and career-oriented professional development. Carmel is very aware in this of the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of the narratives around teacher expertise, observing that the official narrative would not allow the argument that the level of teacher expertise is dropping:

“Well, I'm sure if you looked at all the studies they'd say absolutely not because your teachers are so highly qualified now and they have a Masters and they have this and they have that. But I just don't know if they really...*love* the subject as much.”

As in the passage quoted above, Carmel observes that when her younger colleagues participate in professional development, it tends to be chosen strategically, with an eye to future opportunities and posts. While she does acknowledge that this strategic approach is necessary to enhance their careers, she expresses concern that, “they're not interested in their subject area anymore”. She develops this point by comparing it to her own early career, observing that,

“There's a huge...of course it's a generalisation...but in my experience and in my husband's experience, he would say the same thing as well. Like, em, you know the way, when we started teaching, there was this whole idea of mastery of your subject. That it would take you seven years. And, like, I went and I did an extra-mural course in [university] in Latin because I felt, I felt it would benefit because there was, you know, Greek and Roman, you know, for the History course.”

Carmel and Janet are not the only participants to voice their concerns about a perceived decrease in the value placed on subject expertise by newer entrants to the

profession, with Mary, John, Sinéad, and Evelyn all raising similar concerns. However, John is the only one of these to contextualise this trend with reference to the broader societal and cultural status of the teaching profession. Otherwise, the concerns and criticisms are for the most part directed at what the research participants perceive to be individual characteristics of newer entrants to teaching. This individualisation of professional characteristics that could be better understood and negotiated if they were contextualised is a reflection perhaps of the individualised way in which professionalism has operated historically in the Irish context.

Mary makes the observation that, amongst her older colleagues and peers, for those who have not entered management positions, it is enthusiasm for their subject that continues to sustain their professional motivation:

“I’ve noticed even the teachers that are now in their kind of fifties and sixties in my place, the majority are very energised by the job still [...] But they’ve kind of, they’ve all done, they’ve all excelled in their own subject, they’re all so into their own subject. [...] When I think of them all, they’ve all done that...they’ve all ended up em training teachers in their subject you know or working for their, we’ll say the Maths Association or Applied Maths or whatever.”

This comment is useful in pointing to the importance of subject expertise not only for positive educational outcomes but for also from an affective point of view, particularly for those teachers who do not follow the route of management but who remain as classroom teachers throughout their careers. The perceived downgrading of subject expertise in the priorities of younger colleagues and its replacement with management and leadership expertise positions those teachers within a competitive management environment where there is a limited number of opportunities. Many of them will necessarily remain in the classroom and, arguably, their capacity to sustain a career-long professional motivation will be hampered if it is the case that subject expertise has been devalued in the manner perceived by the research participants.

Challenging competitive individualism: a call for collective teacher agency

In terms of its intersections with relationality, it is arguably inevitable that, where the environment requires a certain type of self-managing and competitive individual, there will be an associated diminishment in collegiality. In a context in which there is a limited number of posts and progression opportunities, it is perhaps natural that individuals will be less collegial and more self-interested. Echoing Janet’s

observation about “career principals”, Carmel observes that, “there’s definitely now...in a school there’s the A and the B team”. She describes what she sees as the contrast between the environment when she started in the profession in the late 1980s and the current one:

“everybody was kind of the same and you hoped to get a post and then a few people wanted to go on and maybe go into management...but on the ground, people were more or less kind of same...But kind of the way that now, no, you start to rise up very quickly, you can differentiate yourself, that you're going to go one direction.”

This emphasis on competition and self-differentiation, as perceived by Carmel, again echoes the arguments in the international literature around the effects of neoliberal discourses on the construction of professional identities. It is interesting to note that the findings discussed in this section are based on observations raised by the participants themselves, rather than in response to direct questions, suggesting that these supranational trends have indeed taken firm root in the context of the Irish education system.

It is not the aim of this study to make generalisable statements about the professional identity of teachers as a group and, of course, it is not possible to state based on these interviews that the value of subject expertise has in fact decreased amongst newer entrants to the teaching profession. However, in keeping with the argument that one’s individual professional identity is made up of a complex interweaving of narratives, it is important to consider the effects of neoliberal discourses of self-management and competitive individualism on the narratives around teaching identities. The observations made by the research participants that the strategic approach to one’s career necessitated by these discourses is, in their view, correlated with a decreasing valuing of subject expertise must be cause for concern in terms of the long-term identity of the profession. If it is the case that this is a narrative which forms part of the professional identity formation processes of teachers, it is necessary to develop counter-narratives which place the intrinsic value of subject knowledge at their centre. Arguably, teacher education and continuing professional development could form part of a strategy to build these counter-narratives.

However, it is perhaps too late to develop alternatives to the narratives of instrumentalism and competitiveness at the point at which teachers have already entered the profession, given that these dominant narratives are not limited merely to the

teaching profession. Indeed, the argument can be made that it is the education system in which teachers themselves attend school that is most formative in terms of instilling a lifelong educational philosophy. Thus, any attempt to tackle the dominance of potentially negative discourses must begin not at the point of initial teacher education but within schools at post-primary and primary level.

From Sinéad's perspective, the current system of curriculum and assessment in the Irish post-primary context and its emphasis on "points, points, points"¹⁶ is responsible, at least in part, for the change she perceives in her younger colleagues' approach to education and to their professional identities:

"we've absolutely backwashed...and brainwashed these young people. And I think it's, you know, it's *damaging*."

As she perceives it, these graduates of a measurement-driven, outcomes-based system of curriculum and assessment at post-primary level are primed to operate in the same way in their professional lives and will adapt easily to an understanding of evaluation as measurement. Referring to the School Self-Evaluation policy, she observes that these types of accountability mechanisms align themselves well with the educational experiences of newly qualified teachers who have been students in the Irish post-primary system with its emphasis on summative, outcomes-based assessment:

"well, they've come into the perfect job for...I can put this in a graph and I can measure my graph. They've come into the perfect job."

This observation highlights the manner in which the "perfect storm" of relatively recent events identified by Conway *et al.* (2013) as creating fertile ground for discourses of neoliberalism in Irish education must also include the system of assessment that has been in existence for decades.

In reflecting on this issue, Sinéad suggests that there has been an intensification of these discourses over the course of the 30 years since she left school, although they have been in existence "for a very long time". She expresses concern at the implications of this intensification, particularly in terms of the dominance of measurement and competition as lenses through which her younger colleagues approach education, and which she feels was not as dominant a feature of her own education :

¹⁶ Sinéad is referring here to the system of points used in the Leaving Certificate examination, which is a summative assessment at the end of second-level education. Grades in the examination are transferred into points, which are used to determine entry to university and other higher education institutions.

“that’s a dangerous scenario. Now, I think that’s been happening, that *has* been happening for a very long time. But again I do think that...back in my day, I never felt that.”

The choice of the phrase “dangerous scenario” is interesting here, illustrating perhaps the degree of concern that Sinéad feels when she considers the effects of an educational context shaped by competition and individualism on her younger colleagues and, indeed, on her students. She uses the example of students’ decision-making around subject choices to highlight the extent to which the necessity to take a strategic approach shapes their educational experiences. She recounts one conversation in particular where a student had decided not to take Art for her Leaving Certificate because of the perception that it is a difficult subject to get a high grade in. The student was opting instead for a perceived ‘easier points’ subject in which she had no interest.

“And I was kind of saying, but do you understand, I said that it’s your choice at the end of the day but...your, your passion...you’re *curtailing* your own, the thing that feeds you. And they would say, yeah, I know that but I have to....It is a mercenary...yeah”.

This type of outcomes-oriented decision-making that comes at the expense of personal passion in education feeds into a model of the ‘successful’ individual as one who engages in the strategic development of the self as project. In terms of how this model influences teacher identity, it favours a teacher who engages in political professional development, adheres to the script of fast-paced career progression and allows little room for collegial collaboration. This is a model that has potentially corrosive effects on the development of an ethical professional identity rooted in a strong sense of educational aims and philosophy. It cannot be argued from these findings that this model is becoming dominant in the context of Irish education, given that the study does not claim to be generalisable. However, that the discourses associated with competitive individualism emerged so strongly from the interview narratives suggests that, to a certain point, they are becoming part of the narrative of teacher identity. The risk that this narrative will become more firmly rooted is perhaps enhanced by the traditional dominance in the context of Irish education of consensualism (Lynch 1987), through which the conditions of possibility for alternative narratives are stifled.

The channelling of the energy of the individual towards the competitive self and towards the necessary project of strategic self-advancement can be seen as having negative implications for the idea of the educational community as a political

community, in the Arendtian sense of politics as linked to action. Where the political energy in a space of action such as an educational community is atomised and channelled towards the self-advancement of individuals, the potential for collective agency is diminished. The current discourses of professionalisation that have been positioned as threatening the professionalism of teachers become more difficult to resist if teachers are facing them as atomised individuals whose potential political energy is instead directed towards competition with each other.

The findings that emerge from these interviews around the increasing dominance of a narrative of teacher identity that emphasises self-management and competition echo the findings of studies across the international literature (Fullan *et al.* 2015; Ballet *et al.* 2006; LaBoskey 2006). In order to withstand the more damaging effects of this macro narrative, a strong counter narrative based on collegiality and collaboration is required (Hargreaves 2000). Taking all the interviews together, one could argue that there is little evidence of such a counter narrative in the professional narratives of the research participants. There are examples within the narratives of positive experiences of collegiality, such as Sinéad's description of an older colleague who mentored her in her early career. However, the impression emerging from the interviews is that, in the course of the participants' careers, collegiality tended to be informal and patchy, with experiences of isolation or a lack of collegiality being much more dominant experiences.

The temporal shift in the manner in which collegiality operated in the interview narratives is interesting, whereby the isolation of the earlier chronological phases segued into individualism in the later phases. Given that isolation and individualism are such closely intersecting concepts, it seems that, in the Irish context, the teaching profession, accustomed to isolation and a lack of collegiality, is particularly susceptible to current discourses of competitive individualism. Discourses do not operate in a vacuum and, as such, the manner in which supranational discourses operate in national contexts is influenced by historical and cultural factors. In this case, as suggested above, the historic lack of collegiality in the Irish context creates a fertile ground for the emergence of discourses of competition amongst professional peers.

In a similar vein, it would be incorrect to attribute the emergence of competitive individualism as a theme from the interviews solely to the influence of international neoliberal trends. Indeed, it was a theme that emerged quite strongly from the interview

narrative of one of the older research participants, John, whose description of his decision-making at various key moments in his career had elements of the strategic self-management that has now come to be associated with neoliberalism. What is perhaps different now, and what emerged from the interviews when taken as a whole, is that, where these characteristics were previously individual traits that varied from person to person, they are now arguably characteristics that are expected and, indeed, necessary in order to create and sustain a successful professional identity. Speaking about her perception of the affective change this pressure to be competitive has brought about, Janet says: “it worries me when you see people in their twenties who should be full of enthusiasm” but are instead caught up in a sense of “[k]ind of looking over your shoulder.” As Janet recognises, the long-term effects and implications of the emergence of competitive individualism as a dominant characteristic of teacher professional identity cannot be predicted: “[a]nd I don’t know where, I just don’t know where it’s actually leading to”. Indeed, it is possible that the more negative effects could be tempered by the development of professional development and inservice programmes that challenge this competitive discourse. This would involve bringing an explicitly political dimension to the notion of collegiality, highlighting that collaborative work and collective agency is essential not just for educational outcomes but also for the sustainability of teacher professionalism in an increasingly precarious context in which the core idea of what it is to be a teacher is being challenged. Positioning continuous professional development [CPD] as a political space of action (Cavarero 2000; Arendt 1958) in this way means that it is not just about individual development but also about the development of the profession and could harness teachers’ collective agency in a way that individualised CPD could not.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the participant teachers' experiences and interpretations of relationality and recognition within the context of their professional lives. Working through the findings around the concept of professional collegiality, the impression emerges of teaching lives marked by isolation, either through personal experience of it or through witnessing its effects on colleagues' lives. The younger teachers in the study do not position isolation as centrally in their narratives as the older teachers, suggesting that there has been a shift over time and that teacher isolation is not as dominant as it was at the time when teachers like Roy and Fiona started their careers. However, as the chapter's latter sections discussed, isolation and low levels of collegiality have segued over time into competitive individualism, a theme raised by each of the teachers in various ways. This shift is one that can be located within international political discourse around neoliberalism and the individualisation of responsibility, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, its increasing dominance in the Irish context, as perceived by these teachers, cannot be solely attributed to international discourses. The co-existence of teacher isolation and of meritocratic individualism (Lynch 1987) that has long been a feature of education in this context provides fertile ground for the competitive individualism of neoliberalism to take root.

Unpacking these findings through the lens of the theoretical framework draws attention to the complexity and ambiguity of the intersections of collegiality, isolation, competition and individualism in the interview narratives. Building in particular on Butler's ideas around relationality as vulnerability to the Other and on Cavarero's understanding of interdependency and the recognition of uniqueness, a model of relationality within teacher professionalism emerges that counters the increasing dominance of individualism. In this model, the interdependency of individual teachers within the profession is emphasised, not merely in terms of a collegiality directed towards improving educational outcomes, but also in terms of an ethical relationality which it is rooted in the recognition of the Other. This can be termed a relational accountability in which, drawing on Cavarero and Butler, individuals are at once responsible for and dependent on the Other. This type of relational accountability can play a role in negotiating the challenges of competitive individualism and the vulnerability that accompanies the atomisation of individuals. This is because, crucially,

relational accountability is built on an interdependency that is rooted in the uniqueness of individuals. This is important because people are drawn to the idea of emphasising the individual, which is part of the appeal of neoliberal discourse. However, a model of relational accountability emphasises the individual not as an atom but as part of an interdependent network in which each relies on the other for recognition of their uniqueness. This version of individuality as rooted in interdependent uniqueness rather than competitive individualism provides space for the type of political community and collective agency to emerge that is necessary to negotiate the challenges of neoliberal discourses.

The next chapter will further unpack the operation of the theme of accountability in the interview narratives. It locates this discussion within the policy context of increasing accountability mechanisms, a theme that was a prevalent preoccupation for a number of the teachers in the study, and highlights the perception of vulnerability that accompanies the introduction of these mechanisms. The chapter goes on to explore other aspects of the theme of accountability that emerged from the interviews, particularly around its intersections with the theme of autonomy and the concept of responsibility. It then returns to the notion of relational accountability introduced in this chapter and discusses its potential as a core element of a reframed teacher professionalism that is firmly rooted in the ethics of recognition.

Chapter 7

Accountability and Autonomy

1. Introduction

The participants in the current study all made references to the operation of accountability mechanisms and their effects on their professional lives and identities. Indeed, it was one of the key themes throughout the interviews. This was not unexpected, given that the international literature has shown that, in recent decades, teachers have perceived an increase in the scale and reach of accountability mechanisms and data-driven measurement systems, often associated with or interpreted in terms of an increasing neoliberalisation of the global educational sphere, as discussed in the literature review. Irish post-primary education has not been immune to this (Conway 2013), with Whole School Evaluation [WSE] and School Self Evaluation [SSE] two examples of policy developments intended to improve monitoring, reporting and school improvement practices (DES 2016; 2003). These policies are located within the Looking At Our Schools framework, which is

“designed for teachers and for school leaders to use in implementing the most effective and engaging teaching and learning approaches and in enhancing the quality of leadership in their schools.”

(DES 2016, p.6)

While the principles outlined within this framework are described as “holistic” and do not explicitly prioritise accountability mechanisms, the interpretation of its enactment that emerges from the interview narratives is dominated by the types of accountability mechanisms that have become associated with the WSE and SSE.

It is instructive at this point to remember that the opening question of the interviews did not highlight any particular theme and that, thus, the topic of accountability mechanisms was introduced during the course of the interviews, as part of the flow of narrative. While many of the participants explicitly discussed the WSE and SSE processes, some of them made more oblique references to accountability in ways that emerged as part of this theme during the coding process. A further point to

note is that, while the theme of accountability featured in all of the participants' professional identity narratives, it was not always experienced in an overwhelmingly negative manner. There were nuances and complexities in the way in which the theme of accountability was understood and interpreted by the research participants. Indeed, some participants negotiated space within this theme for an agentic expression of their professional identity, a type of resistance from within the dominant discourse. This will be further discussed later in the chapter.

In the narratives arising from these interviews, accountability emerged as one of the heuristic concepts through which teacher identity could be interrogated at both the micro and the macro level. The research participants' interpretations of and perspectives on accountability speaks to the complex and nuanced ways in which it operates in the sphere of teacher professional identity. Drawing together the selected experiences of accountability and evaluation described above, it seems apparent that it is the intersections of accountability with both autonomy and affect that makes it a key theme in the construction of teacher professional identity. This chapter will address these intersections by exploring the concept of autonomy as it relates to accountability, following this with a discussion of the theme of responsibility and how it fits within this dynamic. It will conclude with an exploration of the intersections of accountability and vulnerability, developing this discussion into an argument for a relational model of accountability that draws on the interdependency of individuals as a source of ethical responsibility within teacher professionalism.

For four of the research participants, the introduction of school evaluation policies was a key moment in their professional lives and, as such, was a focus point in their interview narratives, with their experiences of the evaluation process becoming a crystallisation point for much of their subsequent narrative of professional identity, both at the micro-level of the self and at the macro-level of their perception of the profession as a whole. The first section in this chapter will present these moments from these teachers' biographic narratives, explore their constitutive role within the teachers' individual stories of identity, and discuss some of the key points that emerged around the theme of accountability from these key moments with reference to other examples across the interviews. The following section will discuss the intersections that emerged from the interviews between the concepts of accountability, autonomy, and responsibility. The final section in the chapter will draw together the various strands that

emerged within this theme in a discussion of the role ‘responsive accountability’ (Sachs 2016) can play in the development of an ethical professionalism.

2. Accountability: Punitive or Positive?

The affective challenge of punitive accountability

Janet recently retired from teaching, having taken early retirement after working for over thirty-five years in a single-sex girls’ school in a regional town. Her experience of the first Whole School Evaluation (WSE) carried out in her school is a story she tells in detail and returns to later in the interview. She introduces the topic by stating, “Whole School Evaluation, I don’t know if you’ve heard of that but it’s caused incredible tension”. She characterises the evaluation process in terms such as “humbling” and “debasing” and says that it “left us shattered”. Janet had not had any inspection or evaluation of any description since graduating from initial teacher education [ITE] in 1976 until this WSE in 2010, an experience that, according to the literature on Irish education, would not be unusual for a teacher of her generation.

Throughout Janet’s interview, she made reference to how hardworking and diligent she was in her approach to her profession and highlighted a number of extra-curricular and non-compulsory duties she undertook during the course of her career. She also made a number of references to her perception of the excellent standard of her school and the commitment she and her colleagues brought to maintaining this. There is evidence of the dominant interpretation of good education as outcomes-based and measured by exam results in Janet’s description of her school and colleagues, such as the following example:

“because we were a very hardworking staff, our results were always excellent...like superb, like we would punch way above our weight, given that we were a non-fee paying school.”

Summing up her impression of the WSE process Janet says, “we felt very deflated by it really.” She emphasises that this was in part because “the two inspectors that we had, they were not nice, they just were not” to the point that the staff felt they “were basically laughed at by the inspector.”

Janet's account of the WSE experience, the language she uses to describe it, and the manner in which she referred to it a number of times during the interview narrative suggest that this functioned as one of the key moments in her professional biography in that it was fraught with tension, calling her sense of her professional identity and that of her colleagues into question. The negative position the evaluation holds in her narrative can be attributed to two misalignments, the first between the inspectors' approach and the affective context and the second between the terms of the evaluation and the dominant interpretation of education and pedagogy.

In terms of the first misalignment, many members of staff were experiencing the first inspection of their careers: "for the vast majority of us, it was our first inspection". Indeed for some of those who had not had students with special needs assistants, it was the first time since ITE that they had taught with another adult in the classroom. Carmel also points out in her interview how much of an adjustment it has taken for teachers to adapt to the introduction of evaluation: "that's a huge huge change...that people *see* you teaching. The first ten years, no one ever saw me teaching. No one. I mean, never." This absence of evaluation fits with the literature on Irish post-primary education, which highlights the historically patchy nature of inspection (e.g. McNamara & O'Hara 2012). This misalignment appears to have led to a certain defensiveness on the part of the staff, an understandable reaction given the affective challenge involved. The fact that, on top of this, the evaluation team was perceived by the staff as being "just not nice" only served to heighten the teachers' vulnerability during the process. This is an example of how a policy designed with a normative ideal school in mind did not take into account the historical context of the schools in which the policy would be implemented. Without due consideration of the vulnerability involved in a teacher undergoing an evaluation for the first time in their career, the experience is likely to lead to the defensiveness described by Janet and it is unlikely that sustainable and positive learning will arise from it. Indeed, in Janet's case, the tension caused by the experience in terms of her personal narrative of professional excellence understandably led to a wholly negative view on her part of the entire process and a subsequent reluctance to engage with it. This is a circumstance in which a more conscious consideration of the teacher as a unique 'who' rather than just the subject of policy would be more likely to lead to the achievement of the policy's aims. In concrete terms, this could be something as simple as making it one of the roles of the evaluation teams to discuss teachers' personal

experiences of and interpretations of evaluation with them as a first step in the evaluation process, in a non-hierarchical manner and with a commitment to listening to the teachers' voices.

The second misalignment that contributed to Janet's negative positioning of the WSE is an apparent lack of clarity about the pedagogical and educational aims of the evaluation. The terms of reference of the evaluation, based around a constructivist pedagogy and formative assessment, did not match the dominant models within the Irish educational context, which favours transmission-based pedagogy and summative assessment. The evaluation process is part of a strategy to challenge this model and move towards more constructivist pedagogies. However, in the case of Janet's experience at least, there appears to have been a lack of scaffolding around the aims of the evaluation and a lack of inservice or CPD on constructivist pedagogy and formative assessment. This issue was highlighted by Priestley *et al.* in their account of the introduction of a more constructivist curriculum in the Scottish context. They found that one of the barriers to the enactment of the curriculum was an underdeveloped understanding of its aims among teachers and the fact that it involved "incremental change without the development of a clear philosophy of education to underpin the changes in question" (2015, p.636).

Amongst other issues Janet had with the evaluation was the fact that the inspector who observed her classes did not speak the language she was teaching:

"I actually was very cross about it. [...] You know, I mean send me into a Technology class, into a Physics class, sure I don't know, I've no clue...in a foreign language, it was a Junior Cert class that had just come back from their Christmas test. Like...I just don't get it. I don't get it."

This appears to be a case where there was a lack of information about the aims of the evaluation and what the inspector was actually observing, arising from the emphasis on content rather than pedagogy that has traditionally been dominant in the context of Irish education. Janet goes on to describe her colleagues' reaction to some of the matters arising from the evaluation:

"I think most people were very very unhappy with that, with that inspection, yes, they were very...and you know, to be told that...a lot of people were told almost they were boring, that we should be using these AF...these em assessments for learning or whatever...now, I'm sorry, we had had no inservice or anything, I could not imagine... One of my colleagues put up her hand [...] and she addressed the inspector and she said come on now, you tell me that our people here, who want good results, our highly

intelligent girls who want good results, do you mean to tell me that we're going to do traffic lights and lollipops and this that and the other thing that they get bored of in primary school?"

These excerpts from Janet's account of the WSE draw attention to a mismatch between the aims and pedagogical objectives of the evaluation and the dominant understandings in the Irish context of educational aims and pedagogy. While it can be argued that evaluation of pedagogy can take place independently of the familiarity of the evaluator with the actual content of the lesson (Darling-Hammond *et al.* 1983), this viewpoint was not shared by Janet and her colleagues. This is understandable in a context such as the Irish post-primary system, where the emphasis traditionally has been very much on content delivery rather than pedagogy (Mac an Ghail *et al.* 2004). Similarly, the staff's reaction to the discussion of AfL (assessment for learning) methods reflects an educational philosophy that is focused on outputs rather than process. Indeed, Janet's positioning of the school and the students as excellent is based on their high standard of achievement in examinations. It would seem essential that, if the WSE is to be a constructive process, this misalignment needs to be addressed through pre-evaluation facilitation and professional development that familiarises teachers with the aims, objectives, and guiding philosophy of such policies. Constructive post-evaluation feedback needs to be a core part of this, as otherwise the process is perceived as merely a form of 'tick-box' accountability. Janet takes this position in her observation that the feedback provided from the reports on such evaluations does not tend to be particularly useful:

"if you read inspection reports, they all tend to be very bland really, the inspectors blah blah blah, very happy but the inspectors pointed out the a, b, c, d, and we will be working on whatever."

A key point here is that Janet does not necessarily reject the idea of evaluation and accountability but rather that the WSE process was not, in her experience, a productive model of evaluation. She finds it more constructive to engage with a form of evaluation and accountability that is self-initiated and on her own terms. For example, she observes that

"when you see your own past pupils actually em...actually teaching themselves...you know, and teaching the subjects that you taught them....that's it, that's it. That has to say something. That has to say something, it does."

This was a feature of the ways in which the theme of accountability was experienced across each of the interviews, with the observation being made by a number of the participants that they did not find the feedback from evaluations particularly constructive. As in Janet's case, this did not mean that they rejected the idea of evaluating their teaching and being accountable for their work, but rather that they preferred to base those judgements on more context-specific processes in which they had agency and a sense of voice in the evaluation. This idea ties in with the arguments in Chapter 5 around the intersections of power, voice and status, and the manner in which this intersection has implications for how teachers engage with challenges and change at the meso- and macro-levels.

Carmel's perception of the WSE has echoes of Janet's experiences in that she perceives a disconnect between the policy's aims and objectives and the localised context of the school and classroom. Carmel describes the WSE as "a total waste of time". She explains that, while her school "actually got a very good review", the evaluation "didn't seem to identify any of the problems that we know we have" and that, "they picked up on *rubbish*. I don't even know, just silly things". She also highlights the burden of the process for her and her colleagues, particularly given that, in her view, it was not constructive:

"the *time* involved, does that make sense? That people really killed themselves for a couple of weeks. And it was for nothing. It was a facade".

However, while she had no choice but to engage in the evaluation process, she expresses resistance in her characterisation of the report and the feedback as "nothing official" and "a waste of time and money". She is very critical of what she perceives to be the inauthenticity of the process:

"I just thought it was so unreal. I just...And people faked so much stuff. Like, and that makes me so cross. I actually...I would...yeah, I had it all done, I'm head of the English department, we had it all done more or less. But like, people who hadn't just got...they got plans from other schools. Do you know what I mean? Like people do these plans that are like...forty pages long. And that's what the principal wants. And that's...you know...the paper trail is there...and you feel like screaming and saying can I not have a *real* plan? A real plan. Two A4 pages with *my* writing on it."

Again, as with Janet, Carmel is not rejecting the idea of being accountable for her work. Rather, Carmel's rejection of the entire process as a facade speaks to her construction of her professional narrative as one rooted in her conviction that in teaching she has "found

my niche” and the knowledge that she is “really good” at it. This positive professional self-perception has allowed her to sustain an engaged, committed and motivated identity throughout her career, despite the difficult school context she describes, and she has participated in numerous professional development opportunities, both formally and informally. Her resistance to and rejection of the increase of accountability mechanisms stems from her perception of them as inauthentic and, arguably, from the decrease in autonomy that they represent to her. This can be linked back to her comments around the sense of powerlessness that she feels to be an increasing prevalent aspect of her professional life, which were discussed in Chapter 5.

From an affective perspective, it is understandable that individuals would resist or reject narratives that feel inauthentic or incoherent in their narratives, particularly where those external narratives are imposed without room for autonomy or attention to affect. In this, we see the tension between the desire for one’s unique teaching self and the contextual factors that reduce the conditions of possibility for that self to emerge. The dominance and narrowness of the script of ‘good’ teaching under the current discourses of teacher professionalisation works against the teacher identity narratives of teachers like Carmel, for whom agency and autonomy are core aspects of their desired model of teacher professionalism. This demonstrates again the necessity of fluid and open evaluation mechanisms, that can be adapted to suit school and individual contexts and to allow for teacher agency.

Resistance and agency

Roy’s approach to the operation of accountability mechanisms seems to confirm Carmel’s view that, in some cases, the evaluation process is a facade. There are similarities between Roy’s affective position towards the introduction of evaluations and that of Janet and Carmel, in that he characterises them as “demeaning” and expresses exasperation at the perceived correlation of an increase in accountability and a decrease in autonomy. However, his way of maintaining some sense of agency and resistance seems to be through the creation of an alternative narrative:

“I mean I actually got a bit of sympathy for them eventually because I, I was finding ...I was letting myself do something that maybe I shouldn’t, I let myself be lax about something because I figured, no they had to, they’ve to find something wrong because if they don’t they’re going to be...crucified at the other end so...I would, I remember just saying to one of the Science inspectors, oh I said our data logging system would need

an update really and, of course the inspector jumped on that like, that big thing like oh the school would have to do all this about data logging”

In his description of this tactic, Roy appears to be inverting the narrative that the inspectors are those who hold the power and instead he positions himself as the party who is helping them with a difficult task. Arguably, this helps him in maintaining some sense of agency and control. It can be understood in this way as an example of what Maguire *et al.* (2015) refer to as ‘creative non-implementation’ whereby policies, once produced, are not implemented in a straightforward way but are reinterpreted and reshaped by policy actors at every stage of the process. This is perhaps one way in which Roy manages to negotiate a sense of agency and, thus, power within his professional narrative, given that, as discussed previously, he has negative experiences of power in terms of his relationships within his school with his colleagues and principal.

Fiona creates a similar narrative for herself, of trying to negotiate some power and autonomy within the accountability process in order to manage the affective burden and challenge to her professional self-image that it represents. Like Janet and Carmel, the language Fiona uses to describe the experience of evaluation and inspection reflects the strain it causes for herself and her colleagues:

“it ushered in, I think, a more stressful time for teachers” [...] “the pressure of inspections has created a climate of fear to some extent.”

Her resistance to the imposed narrative takes the form of her rejection of the perceived disconnect between the policy and contextual factors, such as her role as Home School Community Liaison Officer, a role that is specific to schools operating in socio-economically disadvantaged contexts:

“they didn’t show much of an interest in talking to me. And I must say I was disappointed at the lack of...official interest in what I happened to be doing in the school. Because I was *proud* of what I was doing. I wanted to talk about it. [...] So, it surprised and disappointed me. That the focus was purely on what’s going on in the classroom, teaching and learning, which is understandable of course, to focus on that, and also what are management doing, you know. But this...important position of Home School Community Liaison co-ordinator was just...overlooked.”

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Home School Community Liaison role is one in which Fiona is deeply invested and through which she experiences a positive sense of autonomy. This is associated with a responsive accountability (Sachs 2016) on her part in which she is committed to an ethical responsibility towards the students and parents

with whom she works. Thus, Fiona's rejection of the WSE process can also be read in terms of her reacting to the lack of recognition and the associated denial of voice she experiences as result of being excluded from the formal accountability process.

Where Roy's resistance took the form of negotiating the narrative at the level of his interaction with individual inspectors, Fiona's negotiation is at the level of the policy narrative itself, in that she draws attention to what she perceives as a failing within the scope of the evaluation. She resists the lack of voice that has been imposed on her and uses an anonymous feedback facility to say,

“that I was disappointed that the Home School Community Liaison co-ordinator had been excluded from the entire process and I couldn't understand why this should be so.” She expresses satisfaction that subsequent inspections appear to have corrected this oversight and included her successor in the HSCL role in the evaluation, stating that, “at *least* anyway, it showed that they actually read the feedback and acted on it.”

Her description of this experience shows perhaps that, for Fiona at least, the key to negotiating the affective challenge of accountability mechanisms is through finding the space for one's own narrative within the process and that this can be done through maintaining or claiming a sense of voice and being heard. This echoes Cavarero's arguments around recognition and voice as one of the keys to a positive sense of identity. Like Roy, Fiona shows a certain resistance within the dominant discursive context of accountability and evaluation. Where Roy does this through positioning himself as equal to the inspector in terms of power, Fiona resists by attempting to shape the inspection process in some small way, thus positioning herself as an agent rather than a subject within it. Butler's understanding of performativity is useful in considering these actions in that it highlights the complexity of how individuals can simultaneously reinforce and reinterpret dominant discourses through their enactment of them, becoming, like Fiona and Roy, subject and agent at once.

Staying with the idea that finding agency within imposed accountability mechanisms can be a way of negotiating their affective challenges, Sinéad's experience of the evaluation process can be seen as a positive and instructive example of resistance through reframing. While Sinéad and her school colleagues could not resist the introduction of accountability and evaluation mechanisms, they were able to resist the sense that the processes were being imposed upon them in a way that deprived them of agency. This was because, rather than having to negotiate the process at the micro-level

of the self, the entire staff was involved at a meso-level in a self-initiated school evaluation process that preempted and complemented the official WSE process:

“we had another review but we brought in an external. So I worked with him, I volunteered for that committee. There were five of us on that committee, five teachers from the school, all different levels, A Post, B Post, you know, [class] teacher. And em, we did focus group discussion with small groups. Just around the needs of the school, were they being met, what roles we saw as being necessary, we’ll say, for the next five years of [school’s] progress.”

The reasons for Sinéad’s characterisation of this process as a positive one for her and her colleagues lie in the way in which those aspects of the official evaluation processes that were problematic for other research participants were tempered by the approach taken within her school and by the review facilitator.

This process could be seen as an example of how creating a political space of action (Cavarero 2000) at school-level might look in practice. It is made possible for Sinéad and her colleagues to experience a sense of agency and voice within the evaluation process. The staff is involved in the process through focus groups that are run by their peers, an example of harnessing relationality to enact change. Because they arise from the focus groups, the aims and objectives of the evaluation are very much context specific and, thus, more likely to lead to positive action and sustainable change. Above all, the affective burden of the evaluation process is lessened by the reframing of evaluation as mentorship:

“So, loved working with him, found that he was an absolutely wonderful kind of mentor, very very gentle, he had a gorgeous approach, everything was very negotiated.”

The result of Sinéad’s experience of a school-initiated evaluation process means that she is able to view the idea of school evaluation as a positive initiative, although she does give that caveat that it is “[p]ositive when it’s meaningful”, explaining that it she sees how it could otherwise become “just a kind of a bureaucratic exercise.”

3. Autonomy and Responsibility

Accountability and standardisation

The experiences described above all centre on the research participants’ perspectives on the introduction of school evaluation policies as a core mechanism

through which teachers engage with the concept of accountability. However, the concept of accountability also operates at much more diffuse and subtle levels and this came through strongly in the interview narratives. An important feature of the theme of accountability as it emerged from these narratives is that it is not associated only with the types of explicit accountability mechanisms identified as part of the neoliberalisation of education. Accountability as an integral part of teacher identity can exist separately to these mechanisms and processes when it is what is characterised by Conway *et al.* (2013) as ‘intelligent accountability’ or by Sachs (2016) as ‘responsive accountability’.

The discussion of this study’s findings is informed by this idea of fostering an intelligent or responsive accountability as opposed to the punitive accountability associated with discourses of neoliberalism. Within the interview narratives, the question of whether accountability plays a positive rather than a punitive role in the construction of teacher identity is linked to its intersection with autonomy. One of the key points that emerged from the analysis of this intersection within the interview narratives is that positive accountability is both constitutive of and dependent on teacher autonomy. Where accountability mechanisms fail to allow room for teacher autonomy, they are more likely to meet with resistance and have negative affective effects, as in the cases of Janet and Roy above. In the same vein, it is the pre-existence of teacher autonomy and a respect for this that can allow a positive engagement with accountability mechanisms, as in the case of Sinéad above. Moving away from the straightforward case of school evaluation policies, this section looks at some of the more subtle examples of the accountability and autonomy intersection that emerged from the interview narratives. Of particular interest in this is the distinction that emerged during the analysis between, on the one hand, accountability that is rooted in teacher autonomy and a positive self-concept and, on the other hand, accountability that is perceived to curtail teacher autonomy and has negative effects on self-concept, as in the example of the Whole School Evaluation above.

Returning to Carmel’s narrative, the concept of autonomy was a dominant theme throughout the interview narrative, emerging strongly both within her description of moments and experiences from her own career and in her thoughts on education policy and teacher identity more broadly. For Carmel, the intersection of autonomy and power is a fraught one where she has perceived a change over the course of her career. Reading

her narrative through the lens of Cavarero's concept of uniqueness, her increasing sense of disillusionment within her professional life can be interpreted as being linked to the decreasing room she perceives for individuality or for carving out one's own story of professionalism. It is illuminating, therefore, to explore this narrative in more detail, paying particular attention to the dynamic that emerges between accountability and autonomy and how this feeds into her narrative of teacher identity.

One of the ideas which Carmel returned to repeatedly during her interview narrative was the correlation she perceived between an increase in standardisation and a decrease in autonomy. In the analysis, the theme of accountability emerged strongly from her description of and arguments around these ideas. Some of the examples of this were explicitly linked to accountability mechanisms, as in the passage presented above where she criticises the lack of authenticity within the school evaluation process. Other examples revolved around the idea of standardisation rather than any explicit or obvious accountability mechanisms. However, building on the international literature on education and neoliberalism, we see that standardisation can be understood as both an effect of and constitutive of accountability, particularly in the sense of punitive accountability. As highlighted by Carmel, one of the key strategies through which accountability and measurement systems work is through enforcing an adherence to rigid structures:

“they want a certain type of plan, they give us a template and everything with the new Junior Cycle. [...] And they said no, well, actually we were told to do them this way.”

As Carmel perceives it, this enforced standardisation leaves no room for individuals to work in a manner which reflects their autonomy as professionals. Rather, the pressure to conform to the structures that are set result in a behaviour that she perceives as inauthentic. As discussed above, the perception of inauthenticity affects Carmel's narrative of teacher identity negatively because of the divide it introduces between her desired, authentic teacher-self and the limits set by the current discourses of teaching: “that...that makes me cross. Because I'm just thinking, can we not be real here?” She emphasises that these mechanisms are *replacing* rather than complementing the work that teachers had already been engaged in under their own initiative:

“But what I'm trying to say is that people who *had* plans redid them into fake ones. Do you know what I mean? Why would...why couldn't you have the *strength*....to leave them the way they were. But you cannot then, do you know what I mean?”

The fact that teachers who already had plans in place felt they needed to redo them “into fake ones” arguably highlights the powerful effects of accountability discourses and the affective challenges teachers face in maintaining a sense of autonomous professionalism in the face of rigid standardisation processes. This can be viewed through the lens of Cavarero’s theory as an example of how standardisation within teaching reduces the room for teachers’ expressions of their uniqueness. The denial of this recognition and the forced inauthenticity of the ‘fake’ plans has negative implications for teachers like Carmel in terms of their teacher identities because it breaks the coherence between their desired, ‘authentic’ teaching narrative and the externally imposed ‘inauthentic’ narrative of the standardisation discourse.

Carmel also describes her experiences of various inservice days and pilot projects she has been involved in during her career, particularly in recent years, when there has been an increase in the pace of policy developments around curriculum and assessment, as outlined in Chapter Two. Her overarching impression of these experiences is encapsulated in her description of one particular workshop on a pilot project her school was involved in:

“You know, someone comes along from somewhere and they’re the expert. And then they come and they give you this power point presentation and say this is now the way to teach. And that if you don’t buy into that way of doing it....Em and that’s not right. That’s definitely not right.”

Carmel’s impression of the ultimate effects of this standardisation in teaching structures and approaches is that:

“it takes away the power from the individual teacher. At the coalface. [...] you know, you’re just like a technician almost.”

This echoes much of the critique in the literature around discourses of accountability and standardisation and their implications for teacher autonomy and professionalism, articulated perhaps most persuasively in Gert Biesta’s theories on the ‘learnification’ of education and his critique of its positioning of the teacher as a facilitator of learning (Biesta 2015a; 2015b). As discussed in Chapter 3, approaching this issue from the perspective of Cavarero’s theories on uniqueness allows us to see how the reframing of teaching as facilitation of learning denies the individual teacher the recognition of their singularity and of the unique ‘who’ that they bring to the act of teaching. Viewing Carmel’s comments on the standardisation of teaching through this lens, we can link her resistance to the idea of an ‘expert’ telling her and her colleagues how to teach because

it reduces them to a ‘technician’ to the idea that each individual teacher has something unique to bring to the educational relation and that students benefit from ‘being taught by’ rather than just ‘learning from’ (Biesta 2015a; 2015b).

As is the case with much of the critique in the literature, Carmel is most concerned by the links between these processes and a decrease in teacher autonomy, showing just how important this concept is for the maintenance of a positive professional identity. Interestingly, she wonders if perhaps there is still more room in primary teaching for autonomy than in post-primary, a thought echoed in various ways by other research participants and explained by them in terms of there being more room for teacher control over the curriculum:

“I’d recommend primary teaching. I wouldn’t recommend second level. [...] So you could still have a lot maybe more...autonomy. Do you know, yes, all the work has to be done and whatever, you know what I mean, but I just think maybe would it be a nicer job?”

This passage encapsulates one of the key complexities held within the concept of autonomy. In policy discourse, accountability is characterised as being necessary to maintain standards and, in order to achieve this, it is, arguably, positioned as being more important than teacher autonomy. However, as Carmel emphasises, autonomy does not mean at all that there is a lowering of standards in terms of work ethic and accountability: “autonomy, yeah, it’s not that you want to be doing nothing and dassing, that’s not my point at *all*.” The key here is that Carmel positions autonomy not as the absence of oversight but rather as the presence of agency. As she describes it, in the case of punitive accountability mechanisms, agency is removed, leading to a loss of autonomy, and this is what gives rise to the examples she describes of the inauthentic practices around the school evaluation process.

Arising from Carmel’s experiences, it could be argued that the type of punitive accountability associated with a lack of autonomy is one of the principal factors which can give rise to a negative ethics of professionalism. Her characterisation of primary teaching as being affectively “a nicer job” and her linking of this characterisation with a sense of autonomy and self-initiated accountability in terms of getting the work done points towards the strong links between autonomy and responsibility. It could be argued that it is through prioritising this association that a path towards a positive accountability rooted in an ethical professionalism can be found. The following section

will explore this idea further through presenting and discussing some examples from the interview narratives where autonomy and responsibility emerged as interdependent themes and, in turn, fed into the construction of a positive sense of relational accountability, a concept that is a key component of the model of ethical professionalism proposed by the study.

Responsibility, accountability, and autonomy

One of the more striking aspects of the interview narratives is that, for many of the participants, moving away from mainstream classroom teaching towards other roles within the school environment had positive effects for their teacher identities. While, of course, each participant's experience of this was unique, there were certain commonalities that emerged from the analysis of each instance of a teacher moving outside the boundaries of mainstream teaching. The most relevant of these commonalities in terms of the current theme is that, in moving into other areas of teaching, there was a perceived increase in autonomy and this perception was associated with an increased sense of responsibility. This increase in both autonomy and responsibility often posed a certain challenge initially, including an increased workload, uncertain parameters and expectations in the role and increased visibility and contact with the public. However, it was not perceived as a punitive challenge but rather an opportunity to develop or to explore aspects of teaching in a way that was unavailable to them as mainstream classroom teachers. As such, each of the research participants who described such a period in their teaching career positioned it as a positive aspect of their professional narrative.

One example of the intersections between responsibility, autonomy and agency can be found in a story Sinéad tells the story of returning from maternity leave and being told by her principal that she was being moved from the post of responsibility she had held prior to her leave. At the time of this meeting, this was an unwanted move, however she accepted it: "I kind of acquiesced, I kind of said, oh okay, well if you think". This experience appears to have become one of the 'exemplary moments' in Sinéad's professional narrative and she describes in detail her feelings around it, saying for example:

"I don't think I really believed that I had the right to argue, do you know that? I think I was still at a stage, probably professionally as well, where...I, I didn't think my choices

mattered. Or my input about it really mattered. [...] But I certainly, and I know when I came back off maternity leave, I wasn't in that position. Em...and I remember the conversation quite clearly and I remember coming out going, God, I can't believe that I didn't see that coming [...] and it was only, look, it was hindsight and talking to colleagues and saying, I really...and they said to me, you should have, or you could have said...that you really wanted your position back”.

Sinéad's teasing out of this moment in her career narrative points to the intersections of voice, agency and status. It also points to the manner in which the personal and professional are inseparable in her narrative, particularly in this case the vulnerability she experienced in managing her changing professional identity as a new mother, an experience she characterises as feeling like she was “dizzy” and “on a spin cycle.”

Crucially however, this moment in Sinéad's professional identity narrative, while certainly a key narrative point, does not become a focus of bitterness or negative entrenchment. Rather, it appears to function as an impetus to her in her later career to strengthen her voice and agency. Indeed, she returns to this moment at a later point in her interview, describing how she had recently requested a change of role from her principal and explicitly linking this request back to the earlier experience:

“I suppose the conversation that I couldn't have with my principal when I came back off maternity leave, I had with her toward the end of my tenure-ship as [post of responsibility]...I actually suggested that it was time I moved to something else.”

The effects of the earlier moment and its lingering impressions of a lack of voice and agency are somewhat resolved through this action in a way that is clearly important to Sinéad's professional narrative and self-concept.

One of the main factors Sinéad attributes this stronger sense of agency to is the time she spent in a post of responsibility which involved a high degree of autonomy and regular sustained contact with agencies outside the school, both within the education sector and in the commercial sector. As she puts it: “[i]t was an *immense* challenge. And I think I came out of it the other side a much...stronger person”. It seems that contact with the world beyond the immediate setting of her school, even if it presents challenges, is ultimately positive for her sense of professional identity within the school. It is perhaps the idea of finding space for her own voice and sense of agency and, thus, for her own micro-narrative within the broader narrative of the school that is essential to the sustainability of her positive professional identity.

Another element of this theme that emerged during the analysis is that, where there was a change in a teacher's role, there was a change in the way in which the students were positioned in relation to some of the teachers' professional identities. There was a slight shift in the language and tone used by some of the participants when speaking about the students they came into contact with in these non-mainstream settings. This change, while subtle, was discernible particularly in terms of an ethics of care and a sense of the teacher being responsible to and for the students in a self-initiated manner. This suggests that, in the right conditions, an increase in teacher autonomy can give rise to an accountability in the educational relation that is rooted in a sense of ethical responsibility towards others. It is through the teacher experiencing the room to be autonomous and agentic in their professional life that the increase in responsibility and accountability is interpreted positively. Framing this through the study's theoretical framework and the idea of uniqueness, the teacher's experience of being personally responsible for their role and their students places the teacher within the educational relation as a unique individual, rather than somebody just implementing a programme. This sense of recognition of the singular self as essential to the educational relation in question is perhaps what allows the teachers in these examples to recall these experiences in more positive terms than they do in other parts of their narratives.

Amongst the research participants, Roy arguably has one of the least positive career narratives, in that many of the experiences and key moments he describes are ones associated with unacknowledged vulnerability and professional ambivalence. He perhaps sums up his perception of his teaching career when he says, "it's a mixed bag the whole thing...I don't know would I do it again though, teaching" and concedes that, "I went through a low time. You probably figured that. I did go through a very low time in teaching". However, within his complex narrative, he describes one particular year as being "the best year of Science teaching" he ever had. Interestingly, this year was one where he had what would typically be described as a 'challenging' class. In his words, he worked with a group of students who "were kind of a special class, em, now they weren't quite down as special needs but they were, I don't know what you'd really call them, they were...they weren't fit for the mainstream". He realised very quickly that his usual teaching methods would not be suitable for this group and started to develop a pedagogical approach tailored to the group:

“I figured, well, I’m not going to be giving notes or anything here...but I started getting games and things and [...] Now I just, ok, I might have handouts and exercises and..but I didn’t, I don’t think I used one bit of terminology in the whole year.”

Two elements of his story with this group of students are of particular interest to the themes of responsibility, autonomy, and accountability. One is that Roy, as he describes it, came to appreciate these students’ capacities and abilities and is critical of the failings of mainstream education in this regard:

“I would say this though...people are able for Science, they’re well able for it...given their own lead and given the bit of encouragement or the right environment...they get it. I remember bringing in a picture of a squirrel one day...well ’twas amazing what they knew about conservation and disease and ...now they had none of the jargon...they had none of the jargon...but bloody hell they had it...they *really* had it.”

In this example, Roy can be seen to be recognising the students in their singularity and engaging with their perspective. During the year when he is teaching this group, the educational relation he is involved in is based on interdependency because, as he recognises the students’ individual abilities which are not the same as the ‘mainstream’ classes, his sense of responsibility towards them grows, along with the associated sense of responsive accountability. The notion of interdependency comes into this relation in the longer term, as Roy looks back on the narrative of his teaching life and is able to position this year as one in which he was the teacher he wanted to be. It is in the relation between the students and the teacher that the interdependency exists because for a teacher to recognise themselves as their desired teaching self (Forrest *et al.* 2010), there must be students who are willing to ‘be taught by’ (Biesta 2015a; 2015b) that particular teacher in their singularity. If interdependency is understood in this way, as teachers dependent on students for recognition of their singularity just as students are dependent on teachers, then it follows that an increase in standardisation reduces the potential for this type of interdependency to emerge in the educational relation.

The other interesting element is that Roy recognises the negative effects that stringent accountability mechanisms would have had on his capacity to engage this group in a fruitful learning experience:

“if I had had an inspector during that year, I would have been crucified. Like, where’s your plans, where’s your objectives, where’s the outcomes, why haven’t you done this and that and that’s what would have happened and then to be just reduced to a class where you’d just be giving bloody notes and they’re learning off by heart, that’s what would have happened, if I had got an inspector.”

We see in these excerpts the interplay of autonomy and responsibility, in that Roy benefits affectively from having the autonomy to explore an approach to teaching that does not fit the mainstream norms. This feeds into his sense of responsibility towards and respect for the students and these students are positioned positively in his narrative, whereas at many other points in his interview, students are positioned somewhat ambiguously or negatively. One could argue that the room to have other such experiences is more likely to have positive implications for his sense of accountability towards his students than the punitive accountability mechanisms he associates with visits from inspectors. The fostering of such an accountability, rooted as it is in a sense of responsibility and autonomy, is particularly important in the context of an ambiguous narrative of identity such as Roy's, given the correlations between relational accountability, autonomy, and an ethical professionalism.

Autonomy and affect

Other research participants had similarly positive experiences when, for various reasons, they moved away from mainstream teaching into positions where there were less rigid structures and where they had more autonomy in their day-to-day roles. In each case, this increase in autonomy was positively associated with a sense of responsibility and, in the analysis, the theme of accountability emerged from this dynamic between autonomy and responsibility in a way that pointed towards the potential for a positive, ethical and sustainable professionalism, provided that the accountability in question is not punitive but rather intelligent and responsive (Sachs 2016; Conway 2013).

In one example, Mary, who has worked for approximately 25 years in a single-sex boys' school in an urban context, describes arriving at a point in her professional career that she characterises as "a bit of a crossroads really. I was a bit burnt out". At this point she takes a diploma in learning support and moves into resource teaching, a move that, she says, "kind of re-energised me". The reasons she gives for this are that, "obviously you've less corrections and you've less...stress". This may seem initially as though she was simply relieved to get a reprieve from the pressure of mainstream classroom teaching. However, a further unpacking of her observations around resource teaching, when put in the context of her complete narrative, suggest that she gained positive sustenance from the opportunity to be responsible for supporting students on an

individual basis: “I preferred the one-to-one I suppose....and I thought I had the magic wand, I was going to fix these children”. Mary’s positioning of students is ambiguous in places, such as in this example of wanting to “fix these children”. However, in terms of the current argument, it is her own perception of herself as being responsible for the students’ individual wellbeing that is of interest. There is a sense of relational accountability here, where her feeling of responsibility towards her students is increased by the recognition involved in her more personal interaction with them.

Mary’s current plan is to move back into mainstream teaching, her reason being that she feels the new structuring of groups introduced by her school impedes her ability to fulfil her role satisfactorily:

“I find that..the way they’ve it done in my school isn’t great...because all the kids that are exempt from Irish are put in with all the kids that are...that have learning difficulties. [...] And it’s very hard to help a child that’s weak...even though the others are doing their homework, they’re not interfering in any way...but the, the weaker kids are very intimidated, they’re embarrassed you know...so I don’t actually like the way it’s done [...] I just, I wasn’t finding it rewarding anymore.”

This example, although perhaps more subtle than that of Roy above, is interesting in that it is when Mary’s role as resource teacher is changed in a way that is out of her control that she decides to return to the mainstream and that she explains this in terms of affect, in that the role was no longer “rewarding”. This illustrates the important links between perceptions of autonomy, a sense of responsibility and positive affective experiences, and the way in which these links can contribute to a positive sense of agency and accountability within one’s professional narrative

Fiona’s professional self-perception was greatly enhanced by her move away from mainstream teaching into the role of Home School Community Liaison Officer, as discussed earlier in the chapter. Indeed, this phase in her career is perhaps the most significant in terms of the construction of her professional identity and, in her interview narrative, she positions it as “the highlight of my professional career.” The increase in autonomy and responsibility that she associates with this move presented, at first, a challenge:

“So, you know, it, it was challenging. Em and it required courage, you know, to step up to the mark, em take on a very *public* role that was completely different to anything I’d done before and conscious that in, you know, the fishbowl environment that is school....eh.....I....people were...*watching* me. You know, they...because that goes on

all the time....and em feeling a bit exposed...and wanting to to...make a go of this and make it work.”

However, it is apparent from her description of the almost seven years she spent in the role that she successfully negotiated this challenge. Fiona came to gain a sense of professional fulfilment and sustenance from the role that contrasts entirely with her account of the years before taking it on, which she characterises as years of “stagnation” when she merely “clocked in” every day:

“you know, it’s a very wide-ranging em eh role, you know, in terms of the responsibilities. And em I made sure that I...addressed every aspect of the role em over the first year and beyond. Em and I was very professional in that role. Very conscientious, very committed, em driven by a strong sense of moral purpose, em social justice.”

This successful negotiation of the challenge can be attributed partly to the sense of recognition and uniqueness she gained in the role. Furthermore, she had the room to engage with the challenge on her terms and in a way that allowed her a sense of agency and, because it was she who chose to take on the role rather than it being imposed on her, she felt a sense of ownership and empowerment within it. This interpretation of challenge and change fits within the literature on education change and teacher identity as discussed in Chapter 3, where it is the concepts of change ownership and agency within the change that allow teachers to successfully negotiate the inevitable vulnerability that accompanies change in their professional lives.

Fiona developed a strong sense of responsibility and ethical accountability towards the students and parents she worked with in this role, particularly as she gained an understanding “of what it really meant to live in the areas where they live, areas bordering the suburb the school is in”. She links the fulfilment she gained in the HSCL role to her personal narrative in terms of her parents’ education, describing how she found herself while in the role

“understanding at a deep level that...my parents em....never got....you know...chances really in their own lives em because of their background em....you know and eh eh feeling that, you know, it was a pity. You know, and they never complained or talked, they never talked about that but...looking at it objectively...I think it’s a pity that they....particularly my father...didn’t get.....you know, just a better shot at things.”

We see here how Fiona’s professionalism is enhanced by allowing more room for the personal. It is from the connections she sees between her own story and her students’ stories that she draws the motivation to do her best in her professional role. This sense

of relationality and recognition of the self in the other's story is a key sustaining factor in her professional commitment and brings a coherence to the narrative of her teaching life. In the understanding of teacher identity as an intersection of the professional, the personal and the political, Fiona's experience points to how allowing room for the personal within the professional creates the space for the political, if we are to understand political as the space of action (Cavarero 2000; Arendt 1958). Fiona's work within this particular role is political in this sense because she commits herself to, as she puts it, "wanting the parents to have a voice in my work, wanting them to be *involved* in their children's education", thus trying to open up a space of recognition and voice for the parents in the educational domain to which they may not otherwise have access.

Because of her personal connection to the role of HSCL officer, Fiona uses strikingly emotive language in describing its significance within her professional narrative:

"I said, you know, when I was in the role, from very early on, that this was a great gift. I often used that phrase, a great gift. And I was really...thankful. To the principal for *allowing* me this ah opportunity. I saw it as a golden opportunity. So, it it was a very meaningful...and and for the rest of my days, I will look back on it em with a real sense of pride, you know, having been associated with eh, with the scheme."

It can be argued that Fiona's experience highlights the links between autonomy and responsibility and the manner in which a positive accountability can develop when these two interdependent concepts are present. Furthermore, it is clear from her experience that allowing room for affect and vulnerability, as in the case of Fiona drawing on her regret at her parents' lack of opportunity, can have positive effects for the development of a sense of professional accountability that is deep rooted and sustainable. Fiona's description of this period in her teaching career and its positive role within her professional narrative is particularly striking given that her professional identity before this period was much more ambiguous and conflicted.

4. Conclusion

Taking the themes and experiences discussed in this chapter together and exploring their implications for the construction of teacher professional identity points to the necessity of developing an ethical model of accountability. Such a model, arising

as in the examples discussed above from the interdependent dynamics of autonomy and responsibility, would be rooted in a positive and self-negotiated understanding of accountability, rather than the punitive understanding that is based on standardisation, measurement and stringent evaluation mechanisms. This model would allow room for the affective challenges that teachers unavoidably experience in their day-to-day lives and, in so doing, would position affect as an integral part of the construction of teacher identity in a way that, arguably, gives scope for the development of an improved ethics of care towards students. One of the key elements of such a model of ethical accountability is a renegotiation of the discourses of power within the context of teaching, particularly in the current turn towards intensification and learnification. It can be argued that one of the themes that links each of the examples discussed above is the operation of power and its relationship to autonomy, accountability and responsibility. In cases where teachers perceived a vulnerability or lack of power, there was often a rejection of or resistance to accountability and negative affective implications. Indeed, Carmel encapsulates this interplay of power and affect when she observes, “isn’t stress something that you feel powerless about? *That’s* what stress is”. However, when, in various ways, teachers perceived themselves as having some power within their professional lives, in the form of autonomy, of voice, or of freedom, there was an associated positive development of responsibility and ethical accountability.

This notion of responsive and ethical accountability can be found within a model of relational accountability as discussed in the previous chapter. Because relational accountability is based on a recognition of the uniqueness of the individual and also on an acknowledgment of the interdependency of individuals, it emphasises the ‘who’ rather than the ‘what’ within social interactions (Cavarero 2000). Bringing this understanding to the concept of teaching, relational accountability places the teacher as a ‘who’ within the educational relation. If a teacher is allowed room to develop a sense of autonomy which is rooted in agency and responsibility, as in the examples discussed above, they are positioned as a unique and irreplaceable individual within their educational context and within their relationships in that context. This idea is rooted in the teacher’s recognition of themselves as a ‘who’ in the educational relation, where they do not feel like “just a technician”, in Carmel’s words, but rather as though they have something unique to bring to the act of teaching (Biesta 2015a; 2015b). This creates a space of action in which teachers can develop a sense of relational

accountability towards the other individuals within the educational context, particularly students.

The conclusion to this dissertation draws together the themes that have emerged from the findings and that have been unpacked through the theoretical framework and places them within a model of ethical teacher professionalism. This model of ethical professionalism does not aim to replace existing models but to operate as a reframing of the core concepts within teacher professionalism. It draws on the theories developed in the work of Cavarero and Butler around interdependency, uniqueness, vulnerability and autonomy to argue for an ethical core to teacher professionalism that is rooted in relational accountability. The conclusion describes what this model of ethical professionalism might look like in practice and locates it within the literature on teacher identity and on education policy to suggest some ways in which such a model might challenge what has been characterised as the deprofessionalisation of teaching. Finally, the conclusion outlines some recommendations from and practical applications of the findings of the study in terms of continuing professional development and policy implementation and indicates some possible avenues for further research.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: Towards an Ethical Professionalism

1. Introduction

The teachers who participated in this research each had a unique narrative of teacher identity and brought their own individual perceptions and interpretations to their account of what it is to be a teacher in the context of Irish second-level education. These experiences varied from the sense of isolation and vulnerability running through Roy's narrative to the sense of purpose and enthusiasm with which Sinéad spoke of teaching. Each of the teachers drew together a teacher identity narrative which contained both peaks and lulls within their teaching lives, moments of tension, uncertainty, and disillusionment certainly, but also moments of happiness, reward, and deep satisfaction. There were profound ambiguities and contradictions running through the narratives, illustrating the challenge of sustaining a coherent sense of teacher identity in an educational context that is itself complex and ambiguous.

However, if there was one common thread to the narratives, it is that the moments from which the teachers appeared to draw the most sustenance were those moments in which they were alive to a sense of themselves as teachers, that is, as individuals who were actively engaged in an interdependent educational relationship of recognition. John spoke of the chaotic joy of a noisy music lesson, Mary of the quiet pastoral conversations with children whose parents had separated, Janet of being remembered fondly by a student from 30 years ago, and Evelyn of seeing her most vulnerable students grow in confidence. For Fiona, the deepest satisfaction was in being able to pay tribute to the memory of her parents by working closely with the parents in her socio-economically disadvantaged school community, while for Carmel it was the relief of closing the classroom door on external politics and turning her full attention to the students in front her. Roy describes his surprise at how some of his best teaching moments happened with students who had been pushed out of mainstream classes,

while Sinéad describes her delight in getting to know her students on trips away from the classroom.

In these and each of the many other positive instances, that, despite the fraught context, did feature throughout the narratives, the key to the teacher's sense of reward was that they were, in that moment, fully engaged in the *act* of teaching. They may not have been transmitting information or working on any measurable outcome but they were entirely present as unique individuals in an educational space of action. They were, to paraphrase Biesta (2015a; 2015b), engaging in an educational relationship in which their students were being taught by them and no other. Drawing on Cavarero (2000), those exemplary moments from which the teachers drew most sustenance were those moments, no matter how brief, in which they were recognised and recognised others in turn as unique and irreplaceable individuals within the educational relation.

This research set out to examine the teacher identity narratives of experienced second-level teachers in the Irish context and to place those narratives within national and international contexts of education change. This arose from a need to develop a more nuanced understanding of the manner in which the career narratives of experienced teachers might contribute to their interpretations of education change and enactments of policy reforms. The research was located against the backdrop of a particular policy moment in the Irish context at which a combination of changes to working conditions, cuts to pay, and a resisted curriculum reform had led to a prolonged industrial dispute culminating in strike action, a resistance framed in many quarters as arising from intransigence on the part of individual teachers. However, building on the literature on education change and teacher identity (Santoro 2012; 2011; Hargreaves 2005; Lasky 2005; Day *et al.* 2002), the study took the position that teachers' resistance to change at this particular policy moment is more helpfully understood as temporally and culturally located than as linked purely to the current moment. The research thus aimed to examine the individual teacher identity narratives of second-level teachers and to explore how those individual narratives were informed by the national context of second-level education in Ireland. There was a gap identified in the literature on teacher identity in the Irish context around the voices of experienced teachers and as a result of this the study's aims and research questions focused specifically on the teacher identity narratives of teachers with more than 20 years' experience.

Arising from the understanding that national education contexts are increasingly porous in terms of international education policy trends and rhetoric, the research aims encompassed the international aspect of teacher identity discourses. The research thus looked to identify and analyse the operation of international discourses of teacher identity in the narratives of the research participants. The research asked if there were particularities to the way in which these international discourses were interpreted in the Irish context and looked at how the contemporary moment in international policy discourse filtered into the teacher identity narratives of the research participants.

These research aims and questions and the findings that arose from them fed into the core question guiding the analysis of the research. This central research question asked how teacher professionalism might be reframed through the lens of the study's theoretical framework, which emphasises relationality and the ethics of recognition. The analysis of the findings thus aimed to develop a model of ethical professionalism which would complement and enhance existing models of teacher professionalism. Furthermore, and crucially, the analysis looked to identify elements within this model that could challenge the increasing dominance of policy trends that are ostensibly about teacher professionalism but have been critiqued as being more about deprofessionalisation, intensification, and learnification (Biesta 2015a; 2015b; Ball 2003; Hargreaves 2000). In reframing teacher professionalism in this way, the central research question was broken into two sub-questions. Firstly, the research asked what the constituent elements of ethical teacher professionalism might be and then, secondly, it asked what this model might look like in practice, that is, how it could be put into practice in educational contexts.

These aims and research questions were addressed using theoretical and methodological frameworks that drew on the work of Adriana Cavarero (2000) and of Judith Butler (2012; 2004; 2001). Using their respective theories of identity as touchstones, the study developed a qualitative methodology that used open-form narrative interviewing to explore the teacher identity narratives of eight experienced second-level teachers. The analysis approached the interview narratives through the lens of the theoretical framework and drew on concepts that are core to the work of Cavarero and of Butler as structuring themes through which to interpret the findings.

This concluding chapter to the dissertation summarises the findings that have been discussed in the previous chapters, connecting them to the research aims and

questions that have been restated above. The core argument of the study, the idea of reframing teacher professionalism through the lens of ethical professionalism, is then developed through synthesising the arguments within each of the findings chapters and drawing together the themes they explored into a model of ethical professionalism. The chapter then makes some suggestions as to what this model might look like in practice and indicates some practical applications for the arguments that emerged from the findings. Finally, some potential avenues for further research are suggested that would build on and further develop the ideas introduced in this dissertation.

2. Teacher Identity in the Irish Context: Ambiguity and Ambivalence

The findings chapters have discussed in detail a number of the experiences and observations recounted by the participant teachers and have analysed those accounts through the lens of the theoretical framework. As outlined in the discussion of the findings, while each of the teachers' narratives is unique and an entity in itself, there are some commonalities running through them from which conclusions can be drawn in relation to the research questions that ask about the particularities of the construction of teacher identity in the Irish context.

The conclusions around the particularities of the construction of teacher identity in the Irish context build on the discussion of the findings on the operation of concepts such as power and voice. The nuanced manner in which these concepts operated in the teacher identity narratives was found to intersect with a gradual shift in the locus of power within the context of Irish education through the 1990s and into the turn of the century. In an educational context in which the interpretation of power was traditionally associated with control and dominance, the turn towards a more democratic educational relation was perceived in a way as a loss of power. Importantly, this perception was not based on that shift alone but was linked to structural and cultural changes that contributed to a perceived fall in the status of the teaching profession. This was happening at the same time as a shift in the style of school management which was interpreted by the research participants as a move away from a more interpersonal approach towards an administrative model, a shift that fits within the international literature on managerialism in education. This change in school management

approaches was linked in the teacher identity narratives to a perceived lack of voice and recognition at school-level, while the perception of a fall in the status of the profession was linked to a perceived lack of voice and recognition at the macro-level.

Taking these findings together, an impression emerges of a teaching profession in the Irish context that finds itself at a particularly vulnerable moment, as traditional assumptions around what it is to be a teacher and what that represents in Irish society are rapidly shifting. The teacher identity narratives of the participants in this study contained deep ambivalences and ambiguities as the teachers negotiated the complexities of maintaining a coherent sense of teacher identity at a time when some of the constituent elements of those identities were being challenged. Many of the participants positioned themselves as having a strongly developed sense of educational values and beliefs while simultaneously expressing opinions and relating experiences which were characterised by uncertainty and ambivalence. It is not by any means my intention to criticise individual teachers in this conclusion, nor to position them as having problematic interpretations of teacher identity. It is entirely expected that shifts in the interpretation of a profession's identity would contribute to feelings of uncertainty and insecurity for the members of that profession. Rather than critiquing these individual teachers, I draw attention to the manner in which teacher vulnerability, when left unacknowledged and outside a framework of an ethics of care, can rapidly shift towards the defensiveness and wariness that was a feature of some of the narratives in this research.

Education change, particularly the accelerated change that has been a feature of the Irish and international context in recent years, does not only involve curriculum reforms and policy initiatives, it also inevitably involves a shift in the teacher identities of the individuals working in the changing contexts. Given that teacher identity occurs at the intersection of the professional, the personal, and the political, it is to be expected that the rapid changes occurring in education in the Irish context would present a substantial affective challenge to these teachers whose professional role might look entirely different in the contemporary moment to how it looked when they started their careers 30 or so years ago. This affective challenge is intensified for those who experience a lack of space for the political aspect of their teacher identity, that is, a lack of space for the expression of voice and agency.

As mentioned in the discussion of the findings, some of the particular policy moments and educational changes that emerged as significant from the research interviews were anticipated, however others were not. In chronological order, the historical and contemporary changes that featured most prominently in the interviews, and that have been discussed in the findings chapters, were: the 1982 abolishment of corporal punishment; the perceived shift in teachers' social status through the 1990s; the supervision and substitution strikes in 2001/02; the introduction of school evaluation policies from 2004 onwards; and the cuts to pay and increase in working hours following the 2008 economic recession. Interestingly, the industrial dispute which gave rise to this study, which centred on the reform of the second-level Junior Cycle curriculum, did not actually feature strongly in the interviews. There are two conclusions to draw from this, one methodological and the other contextual. Firstly, the fact that the curriculum reform was not a key topic in the interviews is not seen as a weakness of the research but as an indication of the benefit of having committed to openness in the methodological framework. Had the interviews focused on the specificity and contemporaneity of the current policy moment, they may not have brought out the full nuance and complexity of the historical context of the present moment of resistance and professional discontent. Secondly, and following from this, the historical contextualisation of the current moment that is offered by the research findings suggests that, while not insignificant, the resistance to the curriculum reform is an element of something much larger than the details of the reform itself. This is an argument that has been voiced within some of the debate around the reform (e.g. Hogan 2016; Mooney Simmie 2016) and the findings of this study corroborate this position and add some detail to the nature of the discontent that has given rise to the change resistance.

In this study, it was those teachers who were most affected by a sense of vulnerability and a lack of recognition that in turn were most resistant to change. It is logical that, if an individual is already feeling vulnerable and insecure, any additional challenges to their sense of certainty and security will be met with defensiveness. Reading the policy moment that gave rise to this study through the findings that have emerged from it, the perceived intransigence of the teaching profession in the face of curriculum reform becomes an expression of vulnerability from a profession that is struggling with an ongoing shift in what it means to be a teacher. As seen in some of the

research narratives, vulnerability develops and hardens into wariness and defensiveness if it is not recognised and given voice. Education policymakers cannot expect anything other than resistance to change if the ongoing structural vulnerability within the teaching profession is not acknowledged and addressed. Some practical ways in which this might be done are suggested towards the end of this chapter.

One of the research questions this study asked was how international educational discourses were interpreted in the national context of second-level education in Ireland. As argued in the international educational literature, teachers have very much been subject to discourses associated with neoliberalism. Competitive individualism, accountability, performativity, and self-responsibilisation have been widely identified in operation across educational contexts internationally. The findings of this study, while recognising the operation of these discourses within the teacher identity narratives of the research participants, challenge the rhetoric of inevitability around them and suggest that their operation in the Irish context is not simply an echo of their operation in the international context. The findings did highlight the operation of concepts including accountability and competition within the identity narratives of the research participants. However, rather than characterising these individualising discourses as new phenomena associated with neoliberal technologies, I argue that they are better understood as shifts in emphasis of discourses that have always existed in education, perhaps particularly so in the Irish context. It is by setting such trends within their historical, social and cultural contexts rather than by approaching them as free-floating discourses that the challenge they pose to teacher professionalism can best be negotiated. In this way, they can be understood as just one of the strands of narrative that interact to make up a teacher's narrative of identity.

The interview narratives that form the core of this study illustrate the impossibility of isolating any one of these strands of narrative from its context. The research participants' professional narratives consisted of a complex interweaving of strands at the micro-level of the self, the meso-level of the school, and the macro-level of policy, each of those strands in turn influenced by historical, social and cultural contexts. An attention to the situated nature of teacher identity narratives is thus essential in negotiating the challenges presented by the particular discursive shifts in the current global political context. Not unlike theories of policy enactment, it is impossible to predict what form a discourse will take once it is enacted in a particular context.

However, by explicitly addressing the political aspect of teacher identity and by situating this aspect within its temporal context, it becomes possible to recognise patterns and trends in the manner in which discourses operate and, thus, to recognise ways in which to mediate their operation.

Taking the discourse of competitive individualism as an example, its operation in the Irish context cannot be isolated from the particularity of the positioning of the individual in Irish education. Simply criticising newer entrants to the profession for their competitive approach does not address the particular aspects of the educational context that created conditions that allowed that approach to take root so easily. In other words, to decontextualise the critique of the current form of the discourse from its historical form is to lessen the potential for that critique to mediate its negative effects. It is only through recognising the specificity and, indeed, vulnerabilities of a particular context that the local operation of global discourses can be productively critiqued and challenged. It is arguably much easier to critique and criticise discourses that can be attributed to supranational forces than it is to turn the same critical attention to the conditions within national contexts that accommodate those discourses. However, productive critique of the specific characteristics of educational contexts is necessary in order to fully understand the manner in which the potentially negative effects of global discourses can be mediated. This is something which can be done by educational researchers but also by teachers and policymakers, a point which will be further discussed when outlining some recommendations for further research.

3. Ethical Professionalism and the Educational Relation

The core research question guiding the analysis of this study's findings was leading to the concept of ethical professionalism. Arising from the review of the international and national literature and from the emergent findings to the research questions discussed above, this core question asked how teacher professionalism might be reframed through a lens of ethical professionalism and what this reframing might look like in practice. This question was posed with the aim of identifying strategies through which a reframed teacher professionalism could challenge the discursive dominance of a model of teacher professionalism which is better described as

deprofessionalisation. The theoretical framework built around the work of Cavarero and of Butler offered a number of conceptual themes through which to develop and articulate this reframed model of professionalism. While the national context of the research means that certain elements of the findings around teacher identity are, of course, particular to the Irish context, the findings around this ethical reframing of teacher professionalism are very much located within the ongoing international conversation about teacher identity and professionalism. The discussion that follows thus builds on and contributes to both the national and the international literature on teacher identity (Mooney Simmie *et al.* 2016; Fullan *et al.* 2015; O’Flaherty & Gleeson 2014; Conway & Murphy 2013; Braun *et al.* 2011a; 2011b; Hargreaves 2005; 2000). It specifically locates itself within the ongoing conversations in the international educational literature about the negative effects of dominant discourses of teaching professionalism (Sachs 2016; Biesta 2015a; 2015b; Ball & Olmedo 2013; Thomas 2011).

Drawing together the arguments made in each of the findings chapters, some key aspects of teacher professionalism emerge as being key to a reframing of the dominant interpretations of the concept. Importantly, this dissertation is not proposing a wholesale replacement for existing models of teacher professionalism, such as those described in the international literature (e.g. Sachs 2016; Fullan *et al.* 2015; Hargreaves 2000). Rather, it has identified concepts that already exist as elements of teacher professionalism but that are at risk under contemporary discourses of being interpreted and framed in a manner that ultimately leads to a deprofessionalisation of teaching and to an atomisation of individuals within educational contexts. Reframing these concepts through the lens of ethical professionalism places different demands on them and operationalises them in a way that places the educational relation at the centre of teacher professionalism. This reframing is done in the understanding that, for teachers to negotiate and resist the individualising discourses of contemporary politics, teacher professionalism must reclaim education as a political act in the Arendtian sense of the political as a space of action. This action involves approaching the act of teaching from an ethical foundation of relationality and recognition in the understanding that it is from such an ethics that individual and collective agency finds its fullest expression.

The central elements of teacher professionalism that I suggest reframing through the lens of ethical professionalism are autonomy, accountability, and collegiality.

Alongside these reframed concepts, ethical professionalism draws the concepts of recognition, voice, and interdependency into the centre of teacher professionalism. These six concepts are all linked by an overarching emphasis on relationality as a guiding philosophy within education. Highlighting these concepts as key aspects of ethical teacher professionalism does not imply that they replace other concepts such as pedagogy and knowledge, which are inarguably core components of teacher professionalism. In fact, the reason for framing particular concepts through an ethical lens is that neglecting the ethical aspect of professionalism corrodes the idea of teaching itself. This corrosion contributes in turn to an erosion of the importance of concepts such as knowledge and pedagogy, as argued by Biesta in his work on learnification (2015a; 2015b).

The discussion of the findings has explored these concepts (autonomy, accountability, collegiality, recognition, voice, interdependency, and relationality) in detail, analysing their operation in the teacher identity narratives of the research participants through the lens of the study's theoretical framework in order to arrive at a model of ethical professionalism and to suggest what it might look like in practice. Drawing on the experiences of the participant teachers around concepts such as autonomy and accountability, ethical professionalism calls for a reframing of the punitive type of accountability that is a feature of current contexts and replacing it with a relational accountability in which the individual's responsibility to the Other is the core guiding principle. Relational accountability emerges from and contributes to an ethical model of teacher autonomy because, as discussed in the findings chapter, it is at the intersection of autonomy and responsibility that the educational potential of relational accountability is most powerful. Relationality suffuses every aspect of teacher professionalism and, as the chapters on power and status and on recognition and individualism have shown, it is through the act of recognition of the Other that ethical teacher professionalism is at its strongest. This can take the form of collegiality, of voice within a school community, of the personal in the educational relation, of agency within the policy process, or, most crucially, of the act of teaching and being taught by. The key to this understanding of relationality as the core of teacher professionalism is in the position taken by Cavarero and by Butler that interdependency is a foundational element of our existence and one that, when embraced, offers the greatest political potential for the expression of individual and collective agency.

In drawing attention to the political potential of an ethical reframing of teacher professionalism, I argue for a repoliticisation of teaching that takes full responsibility for the emancipatory social justice ideals that are at the heart of so much educational rhetoric. These ideals risk remaining as rhetoric without an explicit turn to the political within the professional. However, this turn cannot proceed through an unquestioning adoption of existing narratives. Rather, it must engage in a reframing of those narratives from a perspective rooted in an authentic ethics of care that places the concept of interdependent individuality at its core, thus challenging the atomisation of competitive individualism. This ethics of care would necessarily extend across the sphere of educational relationships, encompassing students as well as colleagues. Zembylas and Chubbuck (2014, p.176) make a crucial distinction here between the concepts of authentic care and aesthetic care, whereby aesthetic care is caring *about*, whereas authentic care is caring *for*. In terms of educational relationships, this means that authentic care involves care for the person as an individual and not only as a subject of schooling.

The concept of interdependent individuality works through a feminist perspective of identity that is attentive to the affective sphere towards a model of ethical professionalism that has the potential to withstand the more damaging effects of some of the current discourses shaping educational contexts. As outlined above, this reconceptualisation shifts the focus towards the relationality at the heart of education. However, it does not lose sight within this of the individual as unique and irreplaceable (Cavarero 2000). Current discourses work through a “paradox of autonomy” that simultaneously atomises individuals while limiting the parameters of their individual narratives of being. Here, I argue that it is through embracing the uniqueness of individual narratives while also emphasising the interdependent nature of those narratives that the conditions of possibility for an ethical professionalism emerge.

One of the key ideas emerging from the findings of this study was the complexity of the intersection between professionalism and affect. The interview narratives illustrated repeatedly that the research participants drew on the affective sphere in order to sustain their narratives of identity and that, rather than affect being a barrier to professionalism in these narratives, it was often a source of ethical professionalism. Furthermore, where an affective experience such as vulnerability was denied or repressed, there were negative implications for the practice of a sustainable

and committed professionalism. As an example of the former effect, in her approach to the role of Home School Community Liaison officer, it was from the affective domain that Fiona drew her motivation and commitment to the role, connecting it to the educational experiences of her own parents. Similarly, and highlighting that it is not only positive affect that is important, John identifies his disgust and anger at the practice of corporal punishment as a key affective experience in his early career that contributed to his development of a narrative of teacher identity marked by a strong sense of ethics and authentic care.

The idea that the repression of vulnerability has negative implications for teacher professionalism is perhaps best illustrated through the findings that emerged from the interviews around the themes of status and power. For example, where Carmel perceived a change to her professional status associated with what she described as a sense of “powerlessness” and “vulnerability”, it became arguably more difficult for her to maintain a positive narrative of professionalism, using antagonistic language to describe her interactions with some students (“alpha male”, “spoiling for a fight”). This is despite her strong positioning of an ethics of care in her narrative of identity. In another example, the career-long effects of a denial of vulnerability can be discerned in Roy’s narrative. Arguably, the lack of voice and recognition, and the associated negative perception of status he describes contribute to a professionalism characterised by defensiveness, of which an antagonistic positioning of students is a feature (“vindictive”).

Attention to the affective sphere as a core component of professionalism allows us to consider the operation of status and power from a position rooted in an ethics of care. Where there is a negative intersection of status, power, and affect in one area, it is likely that teachers will use their agency to negotiate a reclaiming of power or status in another area. In the case of hierarchical power relations, this may manifest itself through a turning away from an ethical position of care for student towards a position of power or higher status. However, if an ethics of care extends horizontally as well as vertically, so that teachers experience a sense of recognition and relationality in their professional lives, it is less likely that the negotiation of affective challenges will result in a negative expression of power.

One of the principal points raised in the review of the literature on teacher emotions is that affect and emotions tended traditionally to be positioned outside the

parameters of teacher professionalism, given their association with the feminine, the irrational, and the unstable (Fried *et al.* 2015; Uitto *et al.* 2015). While the research on teacher identity has since shifted away from this perspective and these concepts are now firmly located within our understanding of teacher identity, I argue that this shift needs to progress further. The discourse around emotions and affect within teacher identity still positions them as issues to be managed or controlled in the pursuit of professionalism. In other words, and through the lens of performativity, the performance of teacher professionalism still operates within parameters that limit the expression of vulnerability, fallibility or other affective experiences associated with uncertainty. Challenging this discourse, this study argues for a shift in the boundaries of professionalism to encompass the affective sphere as a core component and as a resource in the negotiation of challenges to the profession. In a global context shaped by an erosion of the boundaries between the personal, the professional, and the political, it is no longer tenable to perform a professionalism that is removed from affect. Maintaining a rigid conception of the parameters of professionalism is not possible in a political context so marked by fluidity and instability. However, by placing the affective at the heart of professionalism, uncertainty and complexity can be acknowledged and can become resources to sustain the profession. This reorientation of affect within professionalism can be of particular value in the negotiation of challenges to a positive sense of professional identity (Benesch 2018). Indeed, as was argued in the discussion of the study's ontological framework, embracing the uncertainty and vulnerability of being is necessary if one is to sustain a positive narrative of identity. Extending this to the identity of the teaching profession, a loosening of the parameters of acceptability through an acknowledgement of the complexity of the affective sphere could perhaps sustain a narrative of ethical professionalism in the face of challenging political contexts.

4. Recommendations and Applications

The theoretical contribution made by this research to the educational literature in terms of a reframing of teacher professionalism has been discussed above. In this final section of the conclusion, I add to this theoretical contribution by outlining some

practical ways in which the findings of the research might be applied in educational contexts. These suggestions include ideas for teacher education and continuing professional development, school leadership approaches, and policy processes. I then recommend some potential avenues for further research that would build on the findings of the study and develop its arguments further.

In terms of putting the findings of the study into practical application, the concepts of voice and recognition stand out as being both the most straightforward to start operationalising at school-level and the most impactful when given authentic attention. The research participants' experiences and perceptions point to a number of concrete strategies that school leaders can adopt such as including staff in decision-making, offering facilitation around policy initiatives, creating a mentorship system to improve intergenerational relationships, and creating a support system for colleagues who are experiencing difficulties with developing or renewing their teaching skills. Such an approach could involve regional teacher union groups working together with school leaders to develop CPD programmes that place teacher voice at their centre and that emphasise both the pedagogical and the professional aspects of teacher development. Most importantly however, the findings of this study point to the crucial role played by authenticity in the relationships between colleagues and between school leaders and teachers. Engaging in the approaches outlined will not be successful unless there is an authentic commitment to relationality at the core of the action. It is when a teacher experiences an authentic sense of recognition and of voice within their professional context that they are most likely to be able to sustain a positive and agentic narrative of teacher identity.

The model of ethical professionalism proposed by the study is built around the interlinked concepts of relationality and interdependency, both of which hold the uniqueness of the individual at their centre. Based on the teacher identity narratives of the research participants, where recognition and voice played an essential role in sustaining a positive sense of teacher identity, it seems that bringing the concept of teachers' narratable selves (Cavarero 2000) into ongoing teacher education and continuing professional development could be a way in which to address the operation of potentially negative discourses of teacher identity. Of course, the increasing focus on reflexivity and the critical reflective practitioner (Brookfield 1998; Schon 1987) within initial teacher education does encompass the idea of narrative and self-understanding.

However, it could be argued that, due to the under-theorised adoption of the concept (Beauchamp 2015; McGarr & McCormack 2014), reflexivity has become merely another manner in which particular teacher identity narratives come to be positioned as ‘ideal’ and vulnerabilities are co-opted into an acceptable narrative of resilience and self-critique. Reflexivity and criticality adopted in this way build towards a ‘sameness’ of narrative.

If narrative is to be adopted as a strategy for self-understanding within the continuum of teacher education, it must do so in a manner that allows for individuality and difference in those narratives. Rather than focusing on the content of teacher identity narratives, thus creating an outcome-based practice, it is perhaps more useful to think of narrative as a process-based practice. In this understanding, which builds on Cavarero (2000), it is the act of narration and the associated act of recognition that is key. The emphasis thus is not on the narrative itself but on the interdependency between individuals that exists in the mutual recognition of one’s own narrative by the other. By emphasising this interdependency of teachers’ narratives, it is not sameness that is highlighted but rather relationality. A centring of relationality and the associated acknowledgement of our vulnerability towards the other allows for an ethics of recognition to emerge, which in turn contributes to the sustainability of a positive sense of the teaching self. In practical terms, this means that the facilitation of teacher education involving reflective practice, teachers’ stories, or other narrative strategies must be structured in such a way that there is an openness towards the types of narratives that emerge and a willingness to engage with alternative viewpoints and to challenge dominant assumptions around the ‘ideal’ teacher.

In terms of the policy process, it is the findings around the interaction of the affective domain and policy enactment that is of most practical use. It would seem essential that there is greater attention given to the context of enactment in the design of policy and in the planning of its implementation. Consultation programmes that are currently in use by policymakers are a positive example of how teacher voice can be brought into the policy process. Indeed, as Mary observed, the opportunity to be heard was valuable to her even if she didn’t necessarily use it. This point is important for policymakers to consider when evaluating participation rates in processes such as feedback surveys, where a low response rate might be taken as a lack of interest and a justification not to engage in such information-gathering exercises.

However, while it is positive that there are consultation opportunities in place in the Irish context and many others, the existing mechanisms need to be widened in scope. This is to allow teachers to experience an authentic sense of being heard regarding the contextual factors that surround a particular policy rather than focusing narrowly on the substantive content of the policy itself. Too narrow a focus in consultation processes may result in a deceptively positive reaction to the actual content of a policy initiative as a decontextualised document or strategy but fail to highlight the numerous contextual factors that may in reality lead to the initiative's rejection or failure.

Similarly, the experiences of the teachers in this study showed that the implementation strategies for policy initiatives need to take better account of both the contexts of enactment and the affective challenges that may be posed by the policy. Programme leaders for policy implementation should ensure coherency in terms of the pedagogical aims and educational philosophies of proposed initiatives and the dominant contextual interpretations of pedagogy and education. Where there is not a logical coherence, the initiative should be scaffolded through inservice or continuing professional development, as it is likely otherwise to be rejected outright.

Crucially, the experience of the participant teachers suggests that the challenge of adapting to educational reforms and policy initiatives was made more difficult by the lack of care shown by the policy implementation teams towards the affective domain and particularly towards the vulnerability of teachers in the face of change. Admittedly, suggesting that policy implementation strategies show attention towards the affective domain may appear to be a somewhat abstract idea. However, building on the experiences of the participant teachers, this could take the form of something as simple and concrete as the implementation team sitting down with teachers, asking them for their views, and genuinely listening to the responses before they proceed with the training or evaluation process. The people involved in these teams also need to show an authentic attention to the voices of the experienced teachers with whom they come into contact, recognising that, while those teachers' beliefs may not be in alignment with contemporary educational thinking, dismissing them off hand is likely to lead to an entrenchment of what defensiveness or resistance already existed.

5. Suggested Areas for Further Research

There are a number of potential avenues for further research that arise from the findings of this study and from the model of ethical teacher professionalism that has been developed. Firstly, although there was a demographic specificity to the participants in this research, the methodology and theoretical framework could usefully be adapted to explore the professional identity narratives of other groups in educational contexts. For example, the research participants in this study perceived a strong increase in recent years of the dominance of competitive individualism in the teacher identities of their younger colleagues. A similar methodology could be used to investigate the teacher identity interpretations and experiences of that demographic of teachers and to assess whether the model of ethical professionalism proposed here would be a useful model with which to address the issues that emerge. Similarly, given that the methodological and theoretical frameworks developed are not specific to the Irish context, they could be adapted to explore the operation of teacher identity in other contexts experiencing educational change.

In terms of the findings of the study and the model of ethical professionalism developed, further research could usefully explore the potential of the practical applications outlined above, while defining and developing them further. This could be done, for example, in the context of a practitioner-centred, school-based action research project around the suggested model of ethical teacher professionalism, examining how and to what effect school leaders could operationalise these concepts, particularly in the areas of recognition, voice, autonomy, and relational accountability.

Another area that merits further research is the concept of the school community as a political space of action. This could again involve practitioner-centred research and could, for example, fit within the teacher action research initiatives that are a feature of continuing professional development programmes, including the Irish Teaching Council's Cosán Framework for Teachers' Learning (2016). However, in fitting with the framing of teacher professionalism as ethical professionalism, the aims of such research could extend beyond instrumental learning outcomes and towards the idea of positioning teacher collective agency as a political tool, not only in the sense of teacher unions but in the more relational sense of colleagues creating communities of action towards an educational purpose.

Finally, an unanticipated aspect of the research interviews, and one which is particular to the Irish context, was how strong a role corporal punishment and its abolishment played in the teacher identity narratives of two of the teachers. The maltreatment of children in the Irish context has been associated first and foremost with the religious orders, however corporal punishment in schools was not practiced only by religious personnel but also by lay teachers. While oral social histories have made references to corporal punishment in schools in twentieth century Ireland, the educational research on its use is somewhat limited (see Maguire & Ó Cinnéide 2005). Given that the generation of teachers who were educated and who became teachers before its abolishment are now nearing retirement, it would be interesting to conduct research that asks how their early interpretations of teaching were influenced by the practice. Furthermore, in the understanding that an ethics of recognition is core to education, it should be the case that the voices and experiences of people who suffered under the practice should be recognised and acknowledged within the history of education in the Irish context.

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